**George Konrad:** Something Is Over

# Partisan Review 2

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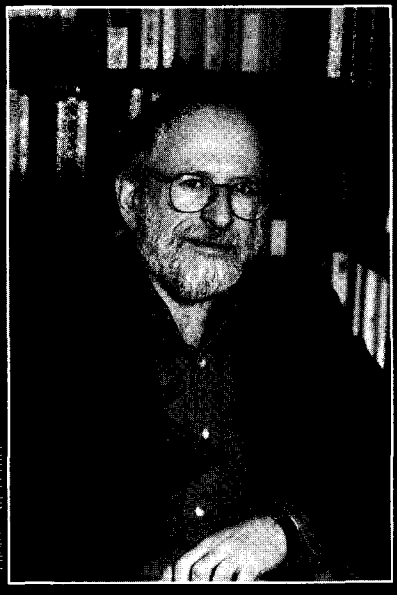

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# Comment

As the debates over the fate of the NEA and NEH are heating up, I have a modest proposal to save both endowments by revising them.

Let me begin with four propositions:

1. Every civilized nation has to have – and is judged by – an advanced art and serious, high-level intellectual activities.

2. The arts and many intellectual activities are not self-supporting in modern society and cannot survive in simple, free-market competition. They must be supported by public funds and private foundations.

3. Serious talented art should be supported for its own sake, not for its economic value, nor for its tourist attraction, nor for the size of its audience. Nobody remembers how many copies of Proust or Mann or Joyce or Eliot were sold originally, nor how many people attended the first performances of Beethoven's symphonies or quartets.

4. Public support – and private aid as well – has been jeopardized by wild, tasteless, politically correct projects that have provided ammunition to the opponents of the endowments and have offended large sections of the population.

The criticism of the NEH has been largely political, while that of the NEA has been largely aesthetic. But both the political and the aesthetic aberrations are part of an overall trendy and ultra-leftist ideology.

Clearly, a considerable part of the academy, the media, popular performers, and inauthentic avant-gardists have fallen into the trends that have become known as political correctness. This tendency that has been falsely labeled as advanced art and thought has produced such monstrosities as Mapplethorpe, the urination on a crucifix by Serrano, and the naked woman covered with chocolate, as well as many less-publicized travesties posing as original art, bucking outworn conventions. It also has produced many outrageous and nonsensical projects funded by the NEH. The reason why they have been funded is simply that the panels making the grants have been composed largely of people who disdain the ideas of quality and standards and espouse trendy causes. The result has been the confusion of serious art with works that shock and flaunt taste, and of serious scholarship with cultural fashions. Thus we have a pseudo-artistic and pseudo-intellectual, self-perpetuating group of bureaucrats that make up both the judges and the judged, many of whom may be manipulated.

On the other hand, in the political realm, some conservative Republicans in their assault on the endowments have spread further

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Editor's Note: A shortened version of this comment appeared in the Op-Ed section of *The New York Post*.

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confusion by referring to those in the academy and the media and those who are running the endowments – the populists, the trendy – as the "elite." The fact is that the true elite are the many outstanding writers, artists, and intellectuals who are opposed to the pseudo-elite. The conservative populists speaking presumably in the name of the people are outdoing the leftist populists, who are opposed to what they call elitism.

Actually, it is not too difficult to sort out the institutions and individuals who should be funded by the endowments, but only if the function of the endowments is seen as the support of the major institutions, the serious magazines, the outstanding writers, artists, intellectuals, and scholars – and not pork-barrel projects, pseudo-experiments, regional enterprises, multicultural causes, wild, offensive schemes. And the endowments have to be free of political pressure or interference. Serious talented art cannot be judged by the public at large. On the other hand, there is no reason why pseudo-art that has only shock value should be supported by public funds. This is not censorship, for people are still free to express themselves or perform as they please.

European nations have had their problems in the funding of the arts. But generally, their leading artists and critics have recognized the outstanding institutions and individuals deserving of support. In Italy, for example, the major opera companies which are known to the serious performers and critics receive regular contributions, despite the fact that many different political parties have led the country.

My own experience in this regard is instructive. In 1965, I was asked by the chairman of the NEA to chair a new organization, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, to dispense a grant from NEA to deserving publications. I was joined by several editors of serious literary periodicals, and we had no problem in funding the best magazines for a couple of years. However, the pressure built up to establish popular, regional panels for populist ventures and for political interests. We might have been able to resist these pressures, if they had not been supported by the literature program director at the NEA, and later by the new chairman. As a result, CCLM ultimately deteriorated, particularly after I left it, into another supporter of race, class, gender, and region.

Another telling instance was the response of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, that state's funding agency a few years ago to a grant application from *Partisan Review*. We were informed in an official letter that in the council's opinion, although the magazine was excellent, it did not qualify for a grant because it was not popular enough and did

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not employ any African-Americans on its staff, and because there were no African-Americans on its Advisory Board. As for the Advisory Board, it is made up of people who agree with the policies of the magazine and help support it financially. (It might be noted that the magazine has only two paid staff positions, and that no African-Americans have ever applied for any staff openings at *Partisan Review*.)

To break the hold of the politically oriented cultural administrators, the question of personnel is of prime importance. Therefore, I would like to suggest a number of names of leading artistic and intellectual figures, who do not represent political interests, for the councils of the two endowments. In many cases, they could make the grants on their own; in others, they would choose the members of the panels.

For the NEA, I would propose such figures as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, Robert Alter, Denis Donoghue, Hilton Kramer, Karen Wilkin, Daphne Merkin, John Hollander, Norman Manea, Susan Sontag, Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, Richard Wilbur, Edward Rothstein, William Meredith, Rosanna Warren, Dana Gioa, John Simon, Robert Brustein, and Jules Olitski.

For the NEH, a comparable council could be formed. Of course, both endowments would have to be chaired by a distinguished artist and an intellectual who are not part of the p.c. network and are also immune to its pressures. Perhaps the transformation of the NEA and the NEH would also influence legitimate and illegitimate opponents of the endowments to support their continued existence.

Given the wide publicity the more flagrant missteps have received, it seems that only a complete overhaul could save the endowments. Defenders of the status quo claim that there have been only a few questionable grants and that most of them have been perfectly acceptable. This is simply not true, as anyone who has seen the list of grants can testify. Public funding cannot be justified for grant projects that not only are trendy and offensive but are also of low quality.

**W. P.**

**The Jewish (?) Film Festival** How do we draw the line between artistic films that help us undercut the taken-for-granted, make some sense of the incomprehensible chaos that surrounds us, and the portrayal of this chaos in popular movies, sit-coms, and in documentaries? In other words, how do we step outside of our own milieu and the pieties we

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live with? One way of doing so is by going to see a few foreign films.

The recent Jewish movie festival presented some examples. I went to the previews not expecting much, but curious, wondering whether I would behold yet another version of *Schindler's List* or Nazi death camps, a nostalgic vista of Jewish ghetto or post-ghetto life, or a prop to Jewish pride. Instead, I saw four productions by German, Russian, and Swedish filmmakers, every one of them in its own way breaking through the customary conventions – thereby making me think of what I knew in a different way, sometimes causing me exceeding discomfort. Each of these films was not pointing to but indirectly was depicting the complexities of Jewish life which, like that of all other ethnic groups, has become intrinsically interwoven with its environment.

Of course, the fact that the action takes place in unfamiliar territories, in Russia, Israel, and Sweden, might be perceived as providing the distance one needs to experience old themes in new ways. However, at least some of the themes, the romantic adventures of two friends, in *Love,* and the celebration of the sixtieth birthday of a Jewish mother in Stockholm, in *Freud Leaving Home,* could be set anywhere.

In the brochure, *Comrade Stalin's Trip to Africa* is described as an "absurdist comedy [of] a Georgian Jewish factory worker suddenly finding himself chosen by the KGB to stand in for Stalin, who is tired of spending hours on his feet in Red Square." Yes, it amuses to watch the KGB *aparatchniks* find, and explain away, that the most perfect double for Stalin is Jewish, to watch how proud this double is to be taken for Stalin, and so on. But in the process, one gets a glimpse of the outlandishly primitive bottle factory he had been working in, of the dilapidated abandoned mansion where he is being groomed, and of the expendability of human life, especially Jewish life. In 1991, a Russian filmmaker finally was able to show, with irony, the misery and repression during seventy-two years of Communist rule. Why, I ask myself, don't mainstream American filmmakers depict these harsh truths? Is it because they expect their viewers not to be attracted to them, or because they think that Americans (and increasing numbers of Europeans) want only to be entertained?

*Love* starts out as entertainment, with two nineteen-year-old pals – the worldly Vadim and the virgin Sasha – looking for sex. But whereas Vadim soon gets married and even sooner is bored by his easy bourgeois life, Sasha falls in love with a young Jewish woman, Masha, and then actively gets caught up in the family's drama. As this working-class boy learns about the vicissitudes of Jewish existence, and finally understands that Masha must emigrate to Israel with her family, he is devastated.

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Now, he returns to their empty apartment and begins to dream of the sexual relationship he never will experience. No docudrama could evoke the desperation of two young people whose love is shattered by the hatred their society has fostered.

*Freud Leaving Home* has nothing to do with Freud, but is about the youngest daughter of a Jewish family, nicknamed Freud, in contemporary Stockholm, whose attachment to her mother is fraught with more than the usual contradictions. But it is about much more, after the family finds out that their beautiful, party-loving mother, Rosha, who dominates the family, is to die of cancer within a few weeks or months. The homosexual son had come for a week's visit from Miami, and the religious daughter from Jerusalem. The lavish birthday party was postponed rather than cancelled: Rosha refused to die in the hospital and insisted on dying as she had lived, after the party was over. By then, we have learned that she had wanted to marry her husband's brother (in whose arms she collapses while dancing), and that this fact had never kept her from being a devoted spouse and generous mother – in spite of her nagging ways. She recommends to her now overly-religious daughter, who had left for Israel after a wild past, to undergo the abortion she wants; reveals to her son that she loves him despite his lifestyle; and is heartened by Freud's lunge into a love affair with a free-spirited, unconventional Swede. Ultimately, she helps her husband and children confront the realities they are running from – while facing her death by encouraging them to make decisions rather than live passively. The family trappings and habits are typically Jewish, but the message is universal. And yet, by talking of a general message I am leaving out a profusion of complicated themes, of subtle interactions that qualify this film as a subtle work of art.

Rosha had survived the Holocaust. Madi, in *Balagan* (*mess*), is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Together with Moni, a religious Jew of Iraqi origins, and with Khaled, a Palestinian, she performs in an innovative and controversial play, *Arbeit Macht Frei. Balagan* is a collage of this play, of interviews with the actors, and of the way they manage to live within their own communities while forging close personal relationships across what truly are nearly overwhelming political and cultural barriers. Personally, I was jolted by the riotous Arab rallies calling for the Jews to be pushed into the sea, and by Khaled, who at the beginning of the film was absolutely convinced that the Holocaust was an Israeli invention – until he visited Vad Yashem in order to be able to act his part. Later on, he has a hard time getting his card-playing chums to accept him. For he let on that on his long car rides to the theater he picks up Israelis, even Israeli soldiers carrying guns, that he is dancing in the nude,

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and that he is cooperating with Jewish actors. Now, they are sure that he is a traitor. I was jarred even more when Madi explains her dissonant approach to the Holocaust and when, ultimately, she violently denounces it as the new Israeli religion and, in strong language, wishes they would stop remembering it.

Even though I myself was fortunate to escape in the nick of time, I have a certain aversion to Holocaust studies. But I lost my grandparents and many other relatives, and thus believe one way to avoid another Holocaust is by remembering. Clearly, *Balagan* is about politics, about what certainly is one of the most explosive and insuperable conflicts in today's world. The film, however, is an esthetic masterpiece that uses the political situation to go beyond it, and thereby breaks new ground.

Actually, I keep wondering whether these four films are the avant-garde of a new wave of post-postmodernism, post-Communist, or post-ideological productions, of esthetics that somehow emerge after a large political upheaval, such as Dadaism, Futurism, and Surrealism after World War I, Abstract Expressionism during World War II, and Existentialism afterwards. (I am not certain of this, but these foreign film producers are worthy of our attention.) Finally, I cannot help but ask myself why in America, where filmmakers who are equally adept at creating special and original effects, have superior equipment, and larger budgets, don't more frequently manage to think beyond making movies for what they believe will interest the maximum number of people – that is, consumers. For motion pictures that play to an audience's sense of humor, to preoccupations with crime and the underlife, or to identification with victims and victimizers, I believe, are unable to cut through from the prosaic to the unconventional and exhilarating, or even to the irritating feelings, which alone may manage to penetrate to their viewers' deepest emotions, and to their esthetic sense.

To answer my original question about the difference between ordinary and extraordinary films: there are no formulas to explain it, nor can a summary demonstrate it. Only the experienced eye can perceive it.

**E. K.**

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# The New World of the Gothic Fox

## A Symposium on Culture and Economy in English and Spanish America

**Edith Kurzweil:** Ever since World War II, historians, economists, and sociologists, among others, have been debating why so many fundamental differences between the North American and South American continents have endured. Unable to come up with a satisfactory answer, they have fallen back on "cultural differences," without, however, exploring these differences in much depth. The editors of *Partisan Review,* who thought that these questions have large implications, decided to use the recent book by Claudio Véliz, *The New World of the Gothic Fox,* to do so from a variety of perspectives, by asking experts from different fields to examine his global theses. In fact, Véliz addresses the multiplicity of causes for the persistence of cultural traditions in spite of the many initiatives, especially by the government of the United States, to help modernize and lift the economic well-being of the peoples on our neighboring continent.

The title of Véliz's book is borrowed from Sir Isaiah Berlin's famous essay on Tolstoy: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Véliz suggests, "Latin America is a hedgehog that since the middle of the nineteenth century has been desperately trying to become a fox, with indifferent results" – due to the tenacity of its Spanish characteristics, and especially to its Counter-Reformation. On the other hand, North America, Véliz's Gothic fox, embodies English culture: it is compatible with the Protestant doctrines which provided a favorable climate for the Industrial Revolution that championed modernity and consumer society. In order to demonstrate this metaphoric comparison, and the existing disparities, Véliz reconstructed historical and political events, some of which his interlocutors agreed with, and some of which they disputed.

The colloquium was sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University and organized by Professor Peter L. Berger, Director of the Institute, and by myself, Editor of *Partisan Review*. Boston University's Professor of Philosophy Roger Scruton spoke on the usefulness of Véliz's pairs of metaphors; Ricardo Arias Calderón, former Vice President of Panama and Professor of Philosophy

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at Florida International University, explored the book's contribution to our understanding of Latin America; Robert Packenham, Professor of Political Science at Stanford University, considered Véliz's perception of the new English-speaking global culture; and Irving Louis Horowitz, Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, elaborated on the book's understanding of modernity. Together with the comments from our audience, and with Véliz's lively responses, we did advance our understanding of the apparently endemic reasons for this North-South divide. Following are the proceedings of the meeting.

**Roger Scruton:** I want to begin by talking about the fundamental idea behind the book, namely the use of a metaphor, or rather two metaphors, to explore an extremely complex historical phenomenon and a very important historical contrast.

Véliz begins with a discussion of the principal metaphor of the hedgehog and the fox, famously taken over by Sir Isaiah Berlin from Archilochus. He makes the very important observation that a metaphor by its nature is false; that is, when we say of something that is not a fox that it is a fox, we are saying something false. Indeed, the whole point of a metaphor is that it is false; this is what distinguishes a metaphor from a simile. A simile is, if effective, true; a metaphor is, if effective, false. Of course in saying false things one can convey truths in an oblique way, but the interesting question is, what kinds of truths are conveyed by a metaphor?

Metaphor plays a large role in poetry and in art generally and is also extremely important to our everyday life. Certain linguists have written about metaphors which are so deeply embedded in our language that we could not remove them without changing the structure of our experience. Véliz's metaphor apparently is not of that kind, so what is the point of using it? I would suggest, just as a tactical first move, that the point of this metaphor really is not so much to compare two things as to bring together our experience of them, to make us see one thing in terms of the other. Rather than noticing analogies particularly, we have something in the back of our minds which, as it were, transforms the aspect of something. A useful example is our habit, when listening to music, of hearing it as being in motion. The idea of movement is in the back of our minds and causes us to hear this sequence of sounds in a completely distinctive way, embarking on a journey through space. That is an example of a metaphor which changes our experience. I think that Véliz's metaphors are in a similar way intended to change our perception of an enormously complex chain of events – a chain of events which led to the modern world being, as he puts it, "made in England." That in

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turn raises the questions as to how one should understand historic events, what is historical explanation, what makes it possible to grasp history and to see it as a whole.

It seems to me, and I am sure Véliz will agree, that there is no hope of a science of history. Every attempt to produce one leads to another collection of metaphors, such as those that you find in the "theory" of Karl Marx, or those which you find in Hegel and in his latter-day offshoots, such as Spengler. Historians who give us the promised explanation of the whole of things do so not by giving scientific theories by which to explain the underlying causes, but by assimilating things into *Gestalten,* which enable us to latch on to them in our experience and feel comfortable with them. It is like a character assessment of a person: we are not really explaining his behavior so much as bringing it together in a unit which will enable us to react towards him in a coherent way. This is perhaps what the best kind of history does.

Véliz uses categories from art history and cultural history, both of which have been much infected by the post-Hegelian wave of German scholarship. In particular, he relies heavily on the category of the Baroque, which, as he remarks, comes to us from Burckhardt and his contemporaries and was made into a central notion of art history by Wölfflin. Véliz also uses the concept of the Gothic, taking it largely from the exponents of the Gothic revival like Ruskin and Fosillon, and incorporating Nikolaus Pevsner's reflections on the Englishness of English art. This very eclectic collection of metaphors and categories is brought together in an attempt to answer a very pertinent question: namely, why are things as they are here in North America and as they are there in South America? And, we might add, why is it that the North has an immigration problem and the South does not?

I don't find the metaphor from Archilochus quite as useful as Véliz does, partly because I have never been convinced that hedgehogs know anything at all, let alone one big thing. It is true that they curl up when attacked – I suppose that is what Archilochus had in mind – a procedure which is invariably fatal in the modern world. It is true that foxes seem to know quite a lot, but I don't really think that either animal illustrates what Véliz has in mind when he contrasts the centralizing tendency of the Spanish civilization in the Indies with the diversified and proliferating tendencies of the English-speaking civilization to the north of it.

I have also never been very happy with the concept of the Baroque as art historians employ it, although I think Véliz has been decisively guided by Wölfflin's definition: "The Baroque firmly repudiated the

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principle of articulation. Absolute unity became the rule, and subordinate parts were sacrificed." As Véliz himself recognizes, Wölfflin read Baroque architecture in a purely abstracted manner. He saw its meaning in terms of its relation to the human body. He was trying to read it as a kind of articulated representation of our own sense of our standing in the physical world. Wölfflin overlooked the thing which is most important to Véliz, which is the connection of the Baroque to the Counter-Reformation. Because of Wölfflin's image, many other disciplines were affected by the idea of the Baroque as a particular artistic style, which could be detached from the Counter-Reformation and understood in terms of a deeper and more universal *Zeitgeist*. In musicology, theater, there arose the fatal description of Bach as a Baroque composer, and along with it the calamity of "authentic performance," and the locking away of the music of that period in museums. I blame Wölfflin and the German art historians for their desire to categorize all artistic endeavor by periods, and to find themes or unifying ideas and structures which would cover music, architecture, literature, history, law, and everything else. I think that this has been a calamity in art history, in musicology, and in criticism.

Fortunately, because Véliz proceeds with a light touch, I think he has extricated himself from his use of this category. He recognizes that what is really important about the Baroque is the connection with the Counter-Reformation and the attempt to reimpose some central discipline on the Church and therefore on Church architecture, as an expression of Counter-Reformation attitudes.

I would say, though, that one cannot understand the Baroque only in terms of this principle of unity and the idea of large forms comprehended within a single plan. What is important is the diversity which is comprehended with the plan. The Baroque style is famous for its proliferation of detail, mouldings and sculptures. Everything, in a self-tormented world above the ground plan of the church, was held together by an over-mastering order. In the work of artists such as Bernini and Borromini this represented a great architectural achievement, but it was not reproduced in the Spanish Baroque with the same success. Stylistic diversity is a very important part of the Baroque, just as the diversity of religious and spiritual experience played a very important part in the unifying spirituality of the Counter-Reformation. So I think one has to qualify Wölfflin's Baroque, not only in the case of architecture, but also in the case of the surrounding cultural history.

Just as the hedgehog turns out to be Baroque, so the fox turns out, in the end, to be Gothic, and Véliz quotes from Ruskin: "It is that

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strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit that is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows among wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied." You might think, if Ruskin had not specifically identified these qualities as belonging to the Gothic, that he was describing a church by Borromini, but of course he is emphasizing something else. Véliz takes up the idea that in the Gothic church the principle of addition, especially in the English Gothic, is the most important instrument in the builders' hands. The building need never be conceived as complete: you could always add a chancel or a chapel, another pinnacle, and so on, always expanding in new directions. This is clearly not true of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Bernini. Pevsner, however, when he seized on this, in his book on the Englishness of English art, made an explicit distinction between the English Gothic and the French Gothic, emphasizing the fact that the English Gothic expands horizontally, colonizing the surroundings, whereas the French is always expanding vertically.

The distinction is interesting. Let me clarify the comparison here by quoting from one of Véliz's final conclusions: "It should be pointed out again that the metaphoric usage proposed here is unashamedly cultural. Although it recruits architectural imagery into its service, it does so with diffidence and, it is to be hoped, prudence. The assertion that the prevalent cultural mode of the English-speaking Americans corresponds to that of the Gothic fox is certainly not strictly or even mainly architectural but cultural. It refers to a manner of conceiving the world, a mode of thought and conduct that originated during the protracted aftermath of the imperial dissolution in the West and that acquired a distinct and separate character in England during the medieval centuries; achieved a quasi-nationalistic flavor under the Tudors; was briefly diverted by the ill-fated centralizing efforts of Stuarts and Puritans, and having been fleetingly disconcerted by the pseudo-Cartesian precisions exemplified by the enlightened despotisms of the day, turned away preferring instead the pleasantly insular understanding – an amiable *entente* – between puritanical steadfastness and aristocratic compromise that matured together with the Industrial Revolution and flowered in the New World."

I would add that all these things did make the spirit of the English-speaking empire completely different from that of the Spanish-speaking empire. By bringing together such art historical and philosophical observations, Véliz's book gives us a means by which to grasp all that he describes. But one should not lean too heavily on the categories them-

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selves. The important thing is the underlying observations. For example, if one really wanted to be specific about architecture, one would have to recognize that the American vernacular church is an offshoot of the English Baroque. It doesn't have much that is Gothic about it. Although it has a spire, that spire is of the kind introduced into the churches of London under the influence of Christopher Wren and Michelangelo and Borromini. There are complex evolutions here which one should not forget. However, Claudio draws attention to the distinction between the law that prevailed in England at the time of the expansion into the empire and that which prevailed in Castile; the distinction between common law and civil law and also between the associated ideas of sovereignty. English law grew up as a social product; even in Anglo-Saxon times it was an affair of local courts or meetings, and the sovereign did not have much to do with it. Later, of course, the sovereign was charged with the business of enforcing the law, but he and his parliament were not the primary creators of the law. The sovereign was already subject to the law in medieval times, as Bracton notes in his commentaries. To a great extent, this is what is responsible both for the law-abidingnesss of the English people and for their penchant for solving problems by compromise and negotiation, and not by central edict. It is responsible for what I would describe as the ordinariness that is found even in the greatest of English cultural achievements, such as the plays of Shakespeare, and for the fact that the English people move with ease and without ostentation through the cultural grandeur which lies ruined all about them.

This is quite the opposite of the world made in Castile, a world in which nothing seems to work without an edict coming from a center and being passed on through highly-regimented jurisprudential systems to the remote colonies. This led to a crisis of legitimacy, when the edicts no longer arrived with the speed required. That is one of the reasons for the economic and social stagnation of South America. I suspect that the lack of instruction from the center is one of the reasons why nothing was accomplished there for so long.

The final part of Véliz's book takes off in a new and most interesting direction, using another historical category: that of the Hellenistic period of late antiquity. Véliz rightly observes that Greek culture was spread all over the civilized world without the Greeks themselves having intended any such thing. The Roman admiration for the Greeks is something which he sees repeatedly in the expansion of English civilization. This is an extremely illuminating comparison, because Greek civilization expanded only after it had lost its own life, when it no longer expressed the great spirit which at first animated it, and when it was living off its

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dwindling capital. It expanded in that period precisely because it was no real threat. Things that are living off their capital, these fading aristocratic phenomena, are welcome at any dinner party, because they are seeking energy only in order to keep going for a few years longer and are a threat to no other guest.

This was true of the English civilization as it expanded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its powers were acquired in a fit of absentmindedness. It was not regarded as a threat but rather as an embodiment of interesting solutions to the problems of the modern world, not the least being the common law itself. The English culture which briefly spread across the world was almost, in our own century, replaced by its most degenerate offshoot, American popular culture – itself made possible by the easy-goingness of the English way of life which allows every form of bad taste to flourish according to its own desires. This culture of bad taste has now become universal: indeed the loss of the distinction between good and bad taste is perhaps the ruling characteristic of the modern world – that and the continuing belief in the validity of legal solutions to social problems. I think we can say that Véliz is right that those two things are the enduring legacy of England, and it is right to compare them with the Hellenization of the Mediterranean in the third, fourth and fifth centuries.

In conclusion, my remarks have been meant as both an expression of my broad agreement with Véliz's thesis and of certain qualms about the exuberant metaphors which are conscripted along the way.

**Peter Berger:** Thank you very much.

**Ricardo Arias Calderón:** Claudio Véliz's book on culture and economy in English and Spanish America is an erudite, superbly written, poetic, intellectually challenging, at moments brilliant book. At the same time it is an ironic, caricatural, oddly manichean book, with a hypothesis, or better still, with a metaphor run wild.

In developing what he calls "a single working hypothesis about the character of the society and the economy of the two great transplanted cultures of the New World," Véliz is really attempting to explain the perceived failure of the Latin American social and especially economic system in contrast to the perceived success of the social and economic system of the United States. The contrast has been an intellectual as well as a political challenge for the greater part of this century and remains so today, even though lately it has taken a different, less pessimistic turn – as Latin American countries attempt, with some degree of positive results, to find their way democratically into the emerging globalized economy.

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Véliz's effort to explain the contrast goes beyond both the political and the economic dimensions, into the cultural dimension, which corresponds to a theoretical as well as to a practical development. Over the past decades there has been an evolution in understanding, and responding to, the contrast between Latin America and the United States. In political terms, the basic response was formulated in relation to the function of democracy. With the all too evident precariousness and serious limitations of Latin American democracy, the challenge was then understood as economic and the response was formulated in terms of the function of a market economy within a democratic polity. But with the mercantilist restraints on market economy and the increased social polarization accompanying it, the challenge has come to be understood in cultural terms, and the responses are formulated in relation to the function of a liberal culture, encompassing a market economy within a democratic polity.

This rediscovery of the cultural dimension of the challenge of modernization, of which Véliz is a firm exponent, coincides, paradoxically enough, with a convergent concern on the part of Catholic social thought, which he so decries. In Pope John Paul II's latest social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus,* the breakdown of Communism is explained as the result of a fundamental anthropological error, as the denial of the subjectivity of the individual as a person endowed with moral autonomy and responsiblity, as well as the denial of the so-called "subjectivity of society," formed by a plurality of intermediary, autonomous groups considered to be structures of participation and co-responsibility. The basic decisions undertaken in a free and social economy, which for the first time is fully recognized by Catholic social thought in this encyclical, be they of work, consumption, savings or investment, imply ethical-cultural options and a style of life. The critique of market economy, according to John Paul II, is directed not so much at an economic system, as at an ethical-cultural system which renders the economic dimension of human life absolute, consequently underrating the ethical and religious dimension, and thereby weakening the whole socio-cultural system.

Véliz's thesis is at cross-purposes, at least at the explicit level, with *Centesimus Annus*. It seeks to prove "that Catholicism is a principal and most visible circumstance affecting the life of the heirs of the imperial Indies and that for a number of complex reasons, some unnecessary, others possibly unjust, the Catholic Church has become symbolically associated with social and political arrangements that, regardless of other considerations, have sustained repeated and catastrophic economic failures and are now widely regarded as inimical to the advancement of industrial

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capitalism and modernity."

On the other hand, the encyclical maintains that in a post-Communist world, where democracy tends to prevail as the principal model of political governance and market economy as the principal model of economic activity, the actualization of Catholic social thought, as an integral part of the Christian message, can render an inestimable contribution to the modern world. It can help to prevent the economy from absolutization, to avert the regression to a "primitive," "radical" or "savage" form of capitalism, to overcome "the phenomena of marginalization and exploitation, especially in the Third World, as well as the phenomenon of human alienation, especially in the more advanced countries," to keep alive the singular value of the individual and of human conviviality often suffocated between the two poles of the State and the market, to render modern culture open to self-transcendence, disposed to maintain the moral conditions of authentic "human ecology," of international peace and of fraternal respect for the human potentialities of the poor.

Despite these cross-purposes, both share the view of the decisiveness of culture. But their concept of the relationship between culture and human activity is quite different. Véliz states that "human thought, human culture, human consciousness, all are founded on the bedrock of human activity." *Centesimus Annus* considers that "all human activity takes place within a culture and has a reciprocal relationship to it." In other words, whereas Véliz considers culture as grounded in fact and artifact and practically inseparable from them, the encyclical considers culture more as a value and project in interrelationship with human activity, thereby transcending fact and artifact.

This helps us understand that for Véliz artifacts carry with them the cultural marks of their genesis and do not really have much transcultural mobility or even transcultural modifiability. "Genesis cannot shape artifact permanently," he writes, "but it does bequeath qualities that are, by necessity, intrinsic to subsequent modifications." For him modernity, with the economy as its "prevalent circumstance," must be accepted lock, stock and barrel, with its "made in England" tag. Thus he even explains the unprecedented growth of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America as part and parcel of the adoption of the "culture of industrial capitalism." He disregards the possibility that one of the causes of this phenomenon may be the anxious search for the experience of intimate community, of strict, simple moral guideliness and of intense other-worldly religiosity, which smaller evangelical groups can provide in a context where more impersonal associative bonds, more complex discre-

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tionary norms of conduct and more socially concerned religiosity are prevailing and often leave a void in human experience.

*Centesimus Annus,* on the contrary, implies that culture as value and project interrelates but is not inseparably bound up with specific artifacts of political or economic character. These artifacts remain relatively open to cultural modifiability even as they tend to affect the culture which adopts and adapts them. Still more, the political and economic artifacts of modernity – democracy and the market economy – by their own development, which reveals both their strengths and their limitations, may very well call for a cultural environment complementing and in significant ways transforming the original liberal, historical, cultural environment from which they sprang.

This perspective gives rise to the double intention of the encyclical. First, it intends to "actualize," that is, to modernize, Catholic social thought by the explicit recognition of the validity of a market economy within a democratic polity, both as "the most effective instrument of allocation of resources and of effective satisfaction of needs," and because it gives "primacy to the will and the preferences" of persons. At the same time, it intends to point out the limitations of the market economy, including the danger of market "idolatry," and to contribute to overcoming them through a renovated ethical-cultural context of Judeo-Christian inspiration.

" . . . Western countries," advises the encyclical in this latter respect, "run the danger of seeing in the downfall of real socialism the unilateral victory of their own system, and for this reason may not worry to introduce due changes into it." Is there not inherent in this danger the concomitant danger of seeing in democracy, market economy and liberal culture, as they presently are, a kind of definitive product of history, an "end of history and the last man" as Fukuyama puts it in neo-Hegelian terms?

While in *Centesimus Annus,* the primacy of culture with regard to economics remains open and flexible, for Véliz it borders on cultural-economic determinism. An astounding expression of this is to be found in his last chapter, as a footnote to the fundamental thesis that for Latin American centralists "One is good, many – diversity – is bad, since truth is one, and only error is multiple." In the footnote, Véliz states: " . . . one wonders whether the mixture of Kantian moral autonomy, romanticism, and nationalism would have proved so explosive and influential in the absence of those dark Satanic mills in the English Midlands. . . ." Such is for Véliz the prevalence of economic artifact within the primacy of modern culture. But there is surprisingly little economic analysis in the

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book, either of Latin America and the U.S., or of Spain and England. One ends up with a cultural view of economics in the light of which there is an economic predominance within modern culture.

Véliz thus summarizes his dichotomy of modern culture: "Gothic foxes and Baroque hedgehogs do not symbolize a polarity between tradition and modernity but between alternative responses to the challenge posed by modernity." An enormously complex cultural creation corresponds to each metaphorical species. To the Baroque hedgehog corresponds the Spanish Counter-Reformation, which "invented" the Hispanic New World, namely today's Latin America, and confronted "the centrifugal tendencies released by Protestantism" with "the centripetal convictions normally associated with papal orthodoxy," according to a "culture of containment" of modernity. Véliz argues that this creation is condemned to crumble due to its economic failure. To the Gothic fox corresponds the English Industrial Revolution, which projected itself to English-speaking America, today's United States, and espoused the centrifugal tendencies of Protestantism, according to a culture of latitudinarian creativity which wholeheartedly embraces modernity. This creation "promises to retain the overwhelming cultural influence of the English-speaking peoples well into the twenty-first century and perhaps beyond," with "the possibility of its metropolitan center emigrating elsewhere in the forseeable future . . . virtually insignificant." An unending, upgraded, latter-day Hellenistic culture!

Behind this contrast, with its manifest asynchronism, lies the stark dichotomy between unity and multiplicity. It is as if we re-encountered in terms of modern culture the pre-Socratic dichotomy between Parmenides's obsession with oneness and Heraclitus's inmersion in the many. On the one hand, there are the characteristics of the Baroque hedgehog who "knows one big thing." His obsession with oneness renders him centralist in space; resistant to change and predictable in time; homogeneous in quality; symmetrical and concentric in composition; monarchical and absolutist in power; hierarchical in structure; organically holistic in scope; communitarian (as in *Gemeinschaft*) in attitude; bureaucratic in organization; Thomist and Realist in mentality; conservative in ideology; urban in disposition.

On the other hand, there are the opposing characteristics of the Gothic fox who "knows many things." His immersion in the many renders him pluralist in space; adaptable to change and unpredictable in time; heterogenous in quality; asymmetrical and eccentric in composition; aristocratic and democratic in power; mobile in structure; individualistic in scope; associative (as in *Gesellschaft*) in attitude; voluntary in

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organization; Ockhamist and Nominalist in mentality; liberal in ideology; naturalist in disposition.

Véliz expresses a grudgingly explicit admiration for the cultural singlemindedness of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. He considers it, together with the English Industrial Revolution and the Russian Communist Revolution, as one of the three imperial ventures of the modern Western world that "have either claimed or attained plausibility as universal entities." But a nearly Platonic dialectic of "the same" versus "the other" presides over the dichotomy between the alternative cultural-economic responses to the challenge of modernity, in Véliz's formulation. It leaves no room for analytical or evaluative ambivalence. The New World, and not just in America, belongs completely to the Gothic fox. This manichean caricature, stimulating as it is as an intellectual device, raises many unanswered questions.

Is the New World so un-new as to be simply the orchestration of two European themes? The uniqueness of the United States, so deeply felt by its Founding Fathers, is barely suggested in terms of the "Hellenistic aftermath." The modern skyscrapers of Manhattan and Chicago are reduced to "the ultimate Gothic statements of our modern industrial moment."

Véliz himself admits to "minimizing unacceptably the role of the United States" and does not examine it in depth. The uniqueness of the "republic of nations" which Bolivar envisaged in Latin America is mostly seen through the prism of the Indies invented by the Castilian monarchy. Its multi-ethnic *mestizaje* is not analyzed at all, either in terms of its original components – Indians of various ethnic groups, Spaniards of various regions and blacks of various African peoples – or in terms of succeeding immigrations from Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. Neither are the tensions and conflicts, dating from colonial times, between the formal structures, political, economic or cultural, and the informal, vital social realities acknowledged. Nor is the diversity of the different nations taken into account. Only in the case of Chile is its purported English-like "insularity with respect to the mainland of Latin America" given as an explanation of its present economic prowess. Yet, in fact its political variations from conservative, to liberal, to radical, to Christian Democrat, to socialist, to military, to democratic "concertación," summarize almost in textbook manner the historical Latin American political options in a way which is hardly insular.

In other words, the English Gothic fox and the Spanish Baroque hedgehog suffered significant mutations upon leaving their original habitat for a new one. These mutations are not really recognized in Véliz's

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book. Moreover, are not the centralist pretensions of the Latin American bureaucratic public powers often so overextended as to render these powers amazingly weak and ineffective, internally as well as externally? "Acato, pero no cumplo" is said to have been the attitude of the bureaucrat in the Indies vis-à-vis royal decrees and quite frequently is the attitude toward centralist decision-making processes in Latin America today. According to Véliz, "The role accorded to central governance was so comprehensive that it extended even to the reality of disorder" in the Baroque political mode and in its general culture. It is difficult to uphold this argument with respect to Spanish culture as a whole – what about Goya's drawings in confrontation with Velasquez's paintings? It is even more difficult to uphold it with respect to Latin America, with its multiple social fragmentation, its recurrent volcanic political eruptions, and its magical realism in literature. Can one really hold that such reality of disorder as the love between Sierva María de Todos los Angeles and Father Cayetano Delaura, set in colonial Cartagena de las Indias, in García Márquez's *Del Amor y Otros Demonios,* or as the love between Flora Larquier and Rafael Urbina, set in modern Buenos Aires, in "La sierva ajena," one of Adolfo Bioy Casares's *Historias Desaforadas,* is encompassed by a higher uni-dimensional order?

On the other hand, has not the governance of the United States, for instance during the creation of the New Deal, often been very strong and federally centralized, while having an effective multiplicity of branches? Is not life in the United States in its working places, its homes, its playgrounds, its study centers, its politics and even its churches, subjected to forceful tendencies of uniformity, that often render pluralism a diversity of the supermarket type, a matter more of label than of content? In other words, the Baroque hedgehog may very well, under closer scrutiny, reveal traits of the Gothic fox, and vice versa.

Véliz's book raises an underlying, most serious issue: are there really two and only two cultural species of modernity, one resisting it as is and one embracing it as is? Are there not a variety of options in the making of modernity? Despite his Platonic dichotomy, Véliz recognizes, though almost in passing, that "the diversities of human culture have become increasingly and intricately interdependent, thus far neither erased nor homogenized by the passage of time but endlessly modified, recombined, reformed, occasionally destroyed and recreated, and producing in consequence a splendidly rich and complicated pattern." Yet he proceeds to sidestep this view with the statement that "it is an achievement of an entirely different kind . . . to generate 'exportable' artifacts and traits that can travel without compulsion beyond the cultural and political

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boundaries of their homeland" and that such is precisely the singular case of the English Industrial Revolution.

Is it credible to present an English empire as being without any compulsion or the United States's superpower sway as also devoid of compulsion, with their cultural forms and only theirs "effortlessly acceptable virtually everywhere"? This sounds more like Milton's early lines in *Paradise Regained:* "now (I) sing Recovered Paradise to all mankind," yet not through one man, as in Milton, but through one people, the English-speaking people.

Contemporary European as well as United States economic analysts suggest that there is more than one cultural version of the successful market economy. Thus, for example, in his book *Capitalisme contre Capitalisme,* Michel Albert, former French Commissioner for Planning, distinguishes between a "Neo-American model" of the market economy and a "Rhenish model." He identifies two general distinguishing factors of the latter model: first, closer ties between competitiveness and solidarity, with a larger role for the use of public resources to promote social justice; second, a greater degree of attention to "the cohesion of the society, its homogeneity, its harmony," a nonquantifiable factor which counters "the harshness of a society, the tearing of its 'fabric,' the tensions which inhabit it," and thereby the "perverse effects of inequalities."

In a convergent line of thought, Lester Thurow, Dean of MIT's Sloan School of Management, in his book *Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe, and America,* contrasts what he calls "the individualistic Anglo-Saxon British-American form of capitalism" with what he calls "the communitarian German and Japanese variants of capitalism." The former places the accent on the individual's personal economic strategy for success and harbors deep mutual suspicions between the private sector and government. The latter emphasizes the importance of joining a company team, which has a strategy as a firm and as part of an economic group, in the context of a national economic strategy formulated by the government, which encompasses strong social-welfare policies.

One cannot dismiss these analyses with the comment made by Véliz that "big and smaller dragons are immensely convincing producers but unimpressive both as creators of new cultural artifacts and as consumers of the goods that they have learned so efficiently to produce," any more than one can equate the English-U.S. experience of nearly two centuries with Asian experiences of hardly four decades. What is important in these analyses is not the prediction as to which model is or will get ahead in the economic competition in any given domain or span of time, but the

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recognition that different cultural contexts integrate in their own ways both the modern political artifact which is democracy and the modern economic artifact which is the market. In other words, there are options in the making of modernity.

For example, comparing two of Shusaku Endo's novels, *Silence* and *Scandal,* set respectively in the seventeenth century and in contemporary times, gives an acute sense both of the radical modernization of Japan and of its ongoing cultural identity. Can one not envisage that as China advances more and more along its long and sinuous march towards modernity, it is fashioning its own cultural variant of it? Can one not conceive, however farfetchedly at present, of Islamic nations turned towards their own cultural version of modernity?

It is surprising and disappointing that Véliz does not follow through on some critical appraisals of the Gothic fox's culture. After pointing to the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft,* he recognizes that there have been enough failures in the transition "to establish the fear of loneliness as a principal scourge of their prosperous modernity." Later after mentioning cultural personalities from Nietzsche to Eliot, he admits that they represent "crucial, occasionally definitive, responses to an awesome process of industrialization without which there would have been no dissolution of traditional community, no tortured transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft,* no isolation in the midst of the metropolis, no anomie, no alienation, no repression, angst or ennui. A hypothesis contrary to a fact? Certainly, but one that sheds additional light on the indisputable verity that without an Industrial Revolution, there could not have been responses, intelligent or otherwise, to its consequences; in the absence of smoke-belching Satanic mills, it is unlikely to find poets calling for new Jerusalems surrounded by greenery."

Once the point about the historical fact is made with such fine irony, why not partake in the human project of attempting, with value-laden creativity, to find new, less cruel, less oppressive, more humane, more fulfilling ways of embracing modernity and of continuing to refashion it? History has not ended. With greenery and all, Jerusalem does remain the horizon for as long as man is man.

On the way to refashioning modernity so as to deal with the fear of loneliness and what comes with it, we need to discover at the grassroots level a sense of community. According to Amitai Etzioni in *The Spirit of Community,* "Our society is neither without community nor sufficiently communitarian; it is neither *Gemeinschaft* nor *Gesellschaft,* but a mixture of the two sociological conditions. America does not need a simple return to *Gemeinschaft,* to the traditional community. Modern economic

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prerequisites preclude such a shift, but even if it were possible, such backpeddling would be undesirable because traditional communities have been too constraining and authoritarian. Such traditional communities were usually homogenous. What we need now are communities that balance both diversity and unity. Thus we need to strengthen the communitarian elements in the urban and suburban centers, to provide social bonds that sustain the moral voice, but at the same time avoid tight networks that suppress pluralism and dissent. In short, we need new communities in which people have choices and readily accomodate divergent subcommunities, but still maintain common bonds."

At the other pole of human social experience, at the national level, we also need to renovate our perspective. Nationalism, which gave impulse to the English Industrial Revolution and inspired the U.S. projection of it, must be transformed. According to Robert Reich, in *The Work of Nations. Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism,* the change from "the economic nation" to "the global web" is already taking place. At the same time, there is a widening divergence of income between "symbolic analysts," on the one hand, and "in-person servers" and "routine producers" on the other hand. There is as well a "political secession" of the first category of workers vis-à-vis the two other categories. "For without strong attachments and loyalties extending beyond family and friends," he explains, "symbolic analysts may never develop the habits and attitudes of social responsibility. . . . Without a real political community in which to learn, refine, and practice the ideals of justice and fairness, they may find these ideals to be meaningless abstractions."

There arises, therefore, the need for a new type of national solidarity, "in which each nation's citizens take primary responsibility for enhancing the capacities of their countrymen for full and productive lives, but who also work with other nations to ensure that these improvements do not come at others' expense." Reich concludes, "We can assert that our mutual obligations as citizens extend beyond our economic usefulness to one another and act accordingly."

The refashioning of itself in terms of a culture with a new sense of community at the grass-roots and a new type of solidarity, inside or outside the nation, is the horizon towards which modernity, in its development, aims to be led by those who live in it or strive for it. These men and women will not be Baroque hedgehogs or Gothic foxes, just plain human beings.

**Peter Berger:** Thank you very much. Well, whatever we can be accused of, it is not of being uncritical. Claudio, do you have some initial

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thoughts in response?

**Claudio Véliz:** Yes, I would like to respond to some of the comments. In a sense, the validity of my thesis has been proved this morning by the two commentators, as exemplars of the positions of the Gothic fox and of the Baroque hedgehog. As Professor Scruton stated, it is important to note that metaphors necessarily are caricatures. Partly because human beings are cultural creatures, and partly because of original sin, over time we have found it very difficult to achieve precision. Precision escapes us, unless we are the makers of it. Mathematics is precise because we invented it. But there is a world that we didn't make, which is beyond our comprehension. History, however, is made by us, so we can enter into it in ways that are more sympathetic and in a sense more plausible. The use of metaphor is one of the means of getting into history. We do it all the time: "the decline and fall" of the Roman empire; the country which is "booming." The architectural connotation of my metaphors have to be taken with a grain of salt, since there are many examples which are not consistent with its formulation. Yet without pushing the architectural sense too far, I think it is clear that the Baroque contains within itself an "order of disorder," which, however, is in equilibrium.

As to Dr. Arias's observations: the free market is itself an artifact. It is a manner of going about things, a cultural artifact. We too have a manner of going about things. In Latin America, for the second time, we are proving that we are very good consumers of European things, of things from elsewhere. We had, give or take a few years, about one hundred years of liberal free-market economic policies in the second half of the nineteenth century, until the Great Depression. In a previous book, I called it "the Liberal Pause." We embraced liberalism because we admired European free-market liberalism. The zenith of this love affair with liberalism was reached when France and Britain signed the free trade agreement in 1863, and by that time all of Latin America came aboard saying, we must embrace the liberal tenets. But it didn't work. . .

Latin Americans held that this was one of the reasons why industrialization didn't take off in their countries. At that time we decided to lower tariff barriers and open ourselves to world trade. Of course we were overwhelmed with manufactured goods from the industrial world. So this isn't the first time we have embraced liberalism or free-market polices; it is the second time. This time it appears in the guise of another artifact from the workhouse of the Gothic fox. The whole world is embracing free market economics right now. There is virtually no alternative. Everyone is doing it. But we are doing so with varying degrees of

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success. There are two or three exceptions. Free-market economics translated into goods as popular as McDonald's hamburgers or bubble gum, into psychedelic skate boards or jeans or jogging shoes, are a cultural tide that seems almost unstoppable, not because it's riding on bayonets or because it is following shock troops, but because people like these things. It is perhaps a cultural phenomenon of an affluent working class.

I could say all sorts of offensive things about this phenomenon, but in fact it is simply a result of the democratic onslaught. Bubble gum is not an aristocratic product. Nor can a ministry of finance that sets aside funds for the production of bubble gum have any redeeming reason to do so. This is a democratic consequence of a special economic, social and cultural disposition. The national sport in Russia is soccer. Who forced the Russians to play soccer? Where is the English invasion whose fleet master has proclaimed: "You play soccer or else"? The *lingua franca* of the world is English. Who enforced this? I am told the number one subject at all universities in China is philology, which means English. Who enforced this? No one. It is the way of things. It is the disposition of the world, the world of the Gothic fox. The free market is a cultural artifact, and we in Spanish America have become fairly efficient consumers. We imitate the manner of consumption of the prosperous nations of the North. Although we have been doing it for a long time, we have yet to become efficient producers. We produce at a lower level: we are not absolutely inept, but we are not efficient. The free market is another consumer good that we are consuming now.

Pope John Paul has a lot in common with the Spanish philosopher Jaime Balmes of the 1820s, who wrote a book proving that Catholicism has within itself a dynamic principle that would make it more efficient, more dynamic in the achievement of economic progress than Protestantism. He argued this very intelligently. My observations have nothing to do with what is going to happen in the future, which I can't predict. But in the past Balmes's argument has not borne itself out. I agree with Lord Macaulay, who argued the opposite of Balmes's thesis.

Macaulay's view of the relation between Catholicism and economic backwardness is too facile. This is not simply a matter of finding examples of poor countries that are also predominantly Catholic: the correlation is vastly more complex, and it has to do with the presiding cultural experience of two different peoples, who are bound together not only by religion, but also by language, legal institutions, and political dispositions. You are right: the Counter-Reformation and the Industrial Revolution are not synchronic. It would be a strange world indeed, in

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which different cultural traditions achieve consummation at the same time. This has not been the case in the past. It should not surprise us to learn that the Spanish Counter-Reformation is a creature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the English Industrial Revolution has dominated our world since the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The reason why I chose to compare these towering cultural achievements is not because they occurred contemporaneously, but because they are the most visible, complex, and demanding, and therefore the best for purposes of comparison, of the many cultural artifacts generated by each of these two great cultural traditions.

The Spanish Counter-Reformation was immensely successful. It pushed forward and settled the boundaries of Catholic virtue, and for over three hundred years protected them against the passage of time. It was essentially a successful attempt to arrest change. It admonished about the futility of trying to improve things; all change is for the worst; we already know how to live a good life; we know what must be done to enter Heaven; this is a time of passage during which change avails nothing; the organicity of the body social is inimical to social mobility; one can be born a peasant, lead a dreary, austere, and pious existence, and gain eternal life, or be born a prince, live sinfully and achieve damnation.

The English Industrial Revolution has encouraged precisely the opposite tendencies; it has thrived on continuing change and made the relentless process of transformation a condition *sine qua non* of survival in the vanguard of its new world. Once industrialism takes hold, it is impossible to avoid continuing transformation; those who try are doomed to fail as dismally as Faust, Peter Pan, and Dorian Gray. The classical sociologists – and Peter Berger – have reminded us from time to time that modernity is to be surrounded by people one does not know, who are either moving up or down, or sideways. In the traditional village everyone knew everyone else; gossip was robust and full of meaning, because it was about people one knew very well. In modernity it has been replaced by plastic gossip, which is about people one does not know and is unlikely ever to meet. Those in supermarket queues probably know much more about the private life of Princess Diana or Mr. Trump than about their next-door neighbors.

It is obvious that social mobility is attended by much that is unattractive, and this probably offers a strong encouragement to those who – like the Holy Father – wish to offer a communitarian response, perhaps even inspired in the ideas of Jaime Balmes, to the social travail of modern industrialism. Yet in the past such attempts have amounted to little more than trying to retain the benefits of industrialization without

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paying the price. This mirage has dominated the social and economic horizon of Latin America for a very long time, making the daunting task of responding efficiently to the demands of modern industrialism all the more difficult.

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, most Latin American countries depended for their livelihood on one, or very few, exportable commodities welcomed in the expanding markets of the industrialized northern heimsphere. The large profits secured by these exports ensured a prosperous style of life for the inhabitants of the great cities, who grew accustomed to the enjoyment of a prosperity that was very distant from the pressures and demands of industralization. This could not go on forever. After the Great Depression of 1929, the only alternative was decisively to take the road of the Industrial Revolution and to come to terms with the dismantling of the traditional community. This has released forces as unstoppable in Latin America as they have been in China or Iran, where Mao Tse Tung and the ayatollahs erected their ineffectual "cultural revolutions" in a desperate attempt to exclude from their countries the dreaded "facts and artifacts" of modern industrial culture, including, of course, whiskey, chewing gum, blue jeans, and rock-and-roll, but not radio and television, which were put to work overtime to spread the message of revolutionary salvation.

These cultural revolutions have not been impressive, and my argument remains firmly founded on the belief that what people do matters, especially when they do it in very large numbers. This need not mean that they have no wish to do something else; it means only that for the time being, whatever it is that they have decided to do has been done and should be taken seriously. People all over the world, and certainly in Spain and Latin America, are embracing the artifacts of the Gothic fox. My task is to respond to this matter of fact. You are absolutely right, Dr. Arias, these are matters of fact and artifact, and I suspect that it is not easy to ignore them when trying to understand human action.

I also agree that it is possible for the human imagination to envisage a future world in which traditional community can be resurrected without the afflictions of loneliness, alienation, and *anomie,* but I would observe that we have been trying to do this for a very long time without success. In our dynamic and expanding capitalist world, the communitarian option seems doomed to suffer endless postponement, especially when competing with the prosperity heralded by the coming of modernity. Even in Spain, where much survives of the pre-industrial community arrangements, the current prosperity is the consequence of annual visits by fifty-seven or more million tourists who pay for their

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room and board with incomes derived from the advances of industrial modernity elsewhere in Europe. That tourism can erode traditional social and cultural habits is beyond question, but this erosion is nothing compared to the one that would result from the wholesale modernization of the country. It is true that in Latin America, like in Spain, traditional community has survived better than in the advanced countries of the northern hemisphere. We function more in terms of friendship and kinship relations than otherwise, and occasionally this takes us close to the boundaries of corruption. However, I believe that these survivals are largely unintended, the consequence of the failure to be embraced by the Industrial Revolution.

The Spanish Counter-Reformation was an integrating, unifying, centralizing, and immensely successful moment in our cultural history that assigned to the "new monarchy" the principle responsibility for the well-being of the realm. A good monarch would dispense "an abundance of justice," and would be intolerant of injustices because these would weigh forever on his conscience. The memory of such a moment casts a very long shadow. We have been slow to convince ourselves that its conceptual architecture is not compatible with the requirements of modern industrialism. We have spent much energy trying to bring it up to date, but with discouraging results. Professor Scruton has referred to the common law of the English and its distance from the civil law tradition that shaped the centralist legal institutions of the Spanish-speaking world. But there is more to this than jurisprudence; the Spanish-speaking peoples also share a centralist religious tradition, while the English-speaking peoples have nurtured a multiplicity of religious denominations. The English language has no central authority; the Spanish language is ordered by the *Real Academia de la lengua,* sitting in Madrid. These differences have not been enormously attenuated by the passage of time. Five hundred years from now, the United States will still have more in common with Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and England than with any other country. There is no doubt that Colombia and Argentina have changed greatly since colonial days, but any visitor will observe that both have more in common with Spain than with, say, France or Italy, let alone Russia or Indonesia. From this cultural vantage point, it can be asserted with confidence that the White Cliffs of Dover can be seen clearly from Cincinnati. That human history is both mirrored and shaped by law, religion, political and economic arrangements, and the like is as evident, in my opinion, as the primacy of language among these determinants.

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**Peter Berger:** I would like to say what in my mind has come out of this morning's discussion. And that is a question which has bothered me for about twenty years or more. I very much agree with Claudio about the basic structure of the modern paradigm which is spreading through the modern world. It seems to me the question is, and I think this is raised very much by Ricardo Arias Calderón, what modification of this is feasible? And if so, how can these modifications be regionalized, which is the question you asked. Could there be a Latin America with modification? Or an Islamic one? That to me is an open question. And I don't think that Claudio closes it. He does talk about the future in a sense, because he says it is unstoppable. Maybe it is unstoppable, but can it be slightly diverted?

**Brigitte Berger:** I do think that the two different cognitive styles, the Gothic versus the Baroque, are coexistent in every society. One does not exclude the other. And within society there is always this tension between the two cognitive styles. For that reason you do have organized culture and popular culture, as we are marching through the modern world. But if one would take a slightly different model, whereby one sees these two cognitive styles as always in juxtaposition, then one could also argue that the so-called English world of cognitive styles is constantly subject to pressures: it can also change towards the Baroque style. For example, the current Gothic administration in Washington, and of course the recent national elections, really illustrate a conflict between different cognitive styles. In other words, Claudio has found something of utmost importance: the insistence of certain kinds of cognitive styles, once they have been fused over the centuries. Yet it is not only internal change but also the externals of institutional structures such as politics and economics that constantly impinge. The same thing could be said using a model with very simple terms, as Claudio has done.

**Liah Greenfeld:** I do not think it is useful to regard Claudio's two metaphors as hypotheses. Metaphors are by definition false, as was noted earlier, and the main characteristic of a hypothesis is that it should be able to be proven true or false. I think nevertheless that the two speakers this morning took it too seriously, and therefore criticized the metaphors on the basis of their being hypotheses – which they are not. They were metaphors. But I would like to address the use of metaphors for historical and sociological explanations. Metaphor is always false, and this is its strength rather than its weakness. Historical generalization is also always false because, in reality, we simply cannot take in every detail of its messiness. Nevertheless, and because of that, we need generaliza-

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tions. It would be ridiculous to simply describe the world as it is.

One can direct the same criticisms that were leveled today against Claudio's work to Max Weber's work. The concepts of the ideal type and of historical generalization in general have exactly the same problems. So we have to accept that we obviously lose some complexity and diversity when we employ those devices which help us to understand reality, because otherwise we could not understand it, and yet be grateful for exactly this loss. It is the price we have to pay.

While Weber's work and Claudio's work may be very similar, the devices they use are different. Claudio's use of metaphor is very helpful in trying to explain the dissimilarity between the North American and South American economies. The explanatory variables are cultural, but culture is very difficult to capture. What exactly in culture exerts its influence on the economy? To find that one element which makes for the influence is almost impossible. As Claudio argues, we could start with an electric toaster and go from there. It would be silly to do that, but how does one decide which element to begin with? As I understand, he suggests that we imagine society as a style and then, if we follow art historians who develop the idea of style, this would suggest to us that what we have to focus on are not the many diverse and complex descriptive characteristics of those cultures – such as bubble gum, electric toasters, or rap music – but one organizing principle which brings all those diverse elements together, many of which can be found in different cultures, in different societies, but which are not brought together in the same way because the principle is different. Focusing on that principle explains the impression left by a culture and its influence.

Those metaphors, either the fox and the hedgehog or the Baroque and the Gothic, pinpoint such principles. That is why we are not mindful of the diversity and the complexity, and obviously you can find lots of fox-like qualities in a hedgehog. It is a strange paradox, but nevertheless this is how reality is: there are lots of Gothic qualities in a Baroque culture, and so on. Wölfflin and Burckhardt to the contrary, this of course does not imply that there are only two styles. The fact that one focuses on two particular styles does not mean that there are no others. It doesn't even imply that those two metaphors are what constitute the organizing principles of those particular civilizations. But these are already empirical questions, which have no direct bearing on the usefulness of metaphor as a heuristic device.

**Zachary Karabell:** I have an empirical question, which has to do with culture as a vehicle of explanation. My question is not only about why we select this metaphor, but why we look at cultural styles or cognitive

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styles as explanations for economic structure to begin with. Perhaps it is the other way around. Perhaps culture emerges from economic systems or from specific historical events. For instance, in the situation of Iberian America and the economic structure which never developed there, why have we considered intellectual or cultural phenomena such as the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, and not more material or tangible events such as the *Reconquista,* to be the chief source of explanation? The experience of the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Moors led to a very strong centralization and a reliance on charismatic authority or personal authority, to the conscience of the king, as it was referred to earlier. In many ways that experience was replicated in America in the encounter with the Native American civilizations. The Spanish people, like the Conquistadors, came and encountered huge pockets of populations and saw themselves in some ways as reenacting the *Reconquista*. If you look at the situation on the Western frontiers of Brazil or in Guatemala, you see in some ways that this conquest is still occurring. Sixty or one hundred years ago, in the wake of Marx, many intellectuals perceived culture as more determined by economics than most do today. I am wondering if economics and material history don't deserve greater consideration than we are giving them now.

Conversely, within the United States, that part of the country where we have had an economy which resembles that of Latin America's monoculture, the economy of the South or Southeast, I think you see a lot of these same values we have been talking about, which you may call hedgehog values. That is, values of loyalty, tradition, or central authority. I am wondering why the Counter-Reformation is the most significant event in our discussion here, and not some of the military or economic aspects of the Latin American experience. This may be a chicken-and-egg question, but if you are going to make a determinist argument about the role of culture, these questions naturally arise.

**Claudio Véliz:** What I find most interesting about the *Reconquista* is that seven hundred years of intermittent warfare, culminating with the conquest of Granada, did not result in the formation of a military state either in Spain or in the Indies. Of course the conquest and early settlement of America brought about an influx of armed men who fought and won a few decisive encounters, but this was followed by the deliberate establishment of a civilian colonial administration that remained in place for the next three centuries. Save for a handful of Caribbean ports garrisoned against pirate incursions, and the troops facing the Araucanians in the southern frontier of Chile, the Indies had no regular

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armies. The Spanish Crown intended the colonial government of the Spanish Indies to be civilian, bureaucratic and dependent on the metropolis, so that it could provide an institutional bulwark against the possible seigneurial pretensions of the settlers. The recurring intervention by the military in Latin American politics is emphatically a post-Napoleonic phenomenon very distant indeed from the colonial tradition. The little Corsican's comment about the marshall's baton inside every corporal's knapsack was heard very clearly, and gave respectability to the countless quasi-democratic, populist adventures of the men on horseback. These held the promise of truly revolutionary swift and decisive social ascent, otherwise traditionally associated with the slow and unpredictable result of life spent in cloisters or lecture rooms. A self-proclaimed chieftain could ride his horse into parliament and become President overnight, but this echoed the Napoleonic, not the colonial, political moment. While it is true that the *Reconquista* produced a class of unusually grasping and insolent warlords, vastly more important is to note that their relentless and efficient suppression was one of the most important of Ferdinand and Isabella's domestic political achievements. Yes, I can affirm that I am immensely less impressed with the military bequest of the *Reconquista* than with the philosophical and cultural prowess justly associated with the Counter-Reformation.

**David Scott Palmer:** I am fascinated by this discussion, because it is concerned with the freshest, long-standing, culturally-based approach to understanding Latin America. Permit me to make three observations in this regard. One is that those of us who are concerned with this approach tend to fall prey to the charge of cultural determinism, if we are not very careful about the way we lay things out. If we base our analysis on the historical context that gives rise to the cultural modalities, which in turn help us understand, in general terms, these New World phenomena, I believe that we are on sounder intellectual ground. The second concern has to do with using culture as an explanation for economic forces; this is a shorthand way of describing a central part of our analysis. But we should not overlook the intervening set of variables, those related to political institutions. In other words, history as mediated through political institutions affects and gives rise to economic institutions. They in turn affect the wider society, which responds in ways affecting political institutions. So the cycle plays on, shaping and being shaped by historical forces in the process.

My third concern relates to Dr. Arias's observations. I share his trenchant critique for a variety of reasons, and yet believe that his generaliza-

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tions about the impact of Spain on Latin America need to be qualified. In the Latin American context, we must distinguish among the different parts of the region. In its simplest manifestation, we know very well that Mexico is not Uruguay, that Venezuela is not Chile, and that Nicaragua is not Argentina. If we distinguish between the degrees to which the Spanish presence penetrated the different parts of its vast New World empire, we observe that the Mother Country was much more involved in some regions than in others. Spain concentrated its efforts in those areas where there were large concentrations of Native Americans and of mineral resources. These became the core of the Empire, while other regions, lacking such attractions, in which Spain took less interest, became the periphery. This helps us understand how it is that Mexico, a core region, can have an authoritarian polity that continues to operate, distinct from the less authoritarian and more democratic polities that have operated historically in Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Chile, all part of the periphery. Now we can more centrally bring into the analysis Dr. Arias's view that the lesser or greater degree of Spanish presence correspondingly affected the greater or lesser degree to which alternative forces, groups, individuals, economic and political forces that were not a part of the Spanish center could emerge. Such a perspective enables us to better understand the dramatic differences within the Western Hemisphere among the more open and more democratic political and economic projects in countries like Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Venezuela on the one hand, and the more authoritarian modalities operating in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia, on the other.

**Peter Berger:** I think precisely by going to the periphery and comparing it to the center one realizes how much the two have in common . . . Let me use the Brechtian technique of *Verfremdung,* of going far beyond the areas we have been talking about, to the Philippines. The one time I was in the Philippines, I had to pinch myself to recall that I was not in Latin America. Until now, the Philippines has been the one country in capitalist South East Asia that is an economic disaster. Is that a coincidence? How far is the reach of the Iberian influence that Claudio was talking about?

**Roger Scruton:** I just wanted to come back to a point Liah raised. She, for very good reasons, thinks of culture as an independent factor which influences economic development. I think it is still very important to bring law into the foreground because people make the mistake of

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thinking that you can introduce a market economy into a country which has no law. This is nonsense. Hong Kong contains four percent of the population of China and produces thirty percent of its gross national product. This has nothing to do with anything cultural. It has to do with the English common law which prevails in Hong Kong and not elsewhere, and which gives security to contract. There is no such thing as a market economy without security of contract. This is why there has been no transformation in Russia or Eastern Europe, except in the Czech lands where law has always been part of the local spirit. In Bulgaria, if you have a contract you can enforce it only if you call in the Russian Mafia to go to your partner's house with a machine gun. I think the Russian situation now is catastrophic, because of the attempt to introduce the market economy first and law second: it should be done the other way around.

**Brigitte Berger:** In defense of Claudio's culture thesis, I would add that of course laws are important, but in Russia, for example, there also is a cultural tradition which does allow for a market economy. Historically, there has to be some kind of cultural transformation before the establishment of modern law.

**Peter Berger:** I have the utmost respect for English common law and its property rights, but the British Empire established it all over Africa with meager results – in terms of its combination of that legal structure with the existing cultures.

**Zachary Karabell:** Yes, we need metaphors, and it is probably better to formulate metaphors than not to organize a messy universe, but there is the danger of a metaphor changing into a cliché. Furthermore, you have set up a dichotomy with the "hedgehog" as an insupportable economic and social system in a modern world and the "fox" as a supportable system. Yet, according to Isaiah Berlin, the definition of a hedgehog is someone who relates everything to a single, central vision, to one system or world as coherent or articulate. It strikes me that this is exactly what you have done in your analysis of our culture. If the hedgehog represents an insupportable cultural and economic system that should be overthrown, how can it serve as a supportable intellectual system by which to define culture?

**Claudo Véliz:** You are right to bring up this point, but I would observe that although Latin America is indeed the home of much diversity, its character is such that it can be accommodated by this metaphor. To

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respond to Professor Scott Palmer, while agreeing with him that there are great differences, say, between Uruguay and Guatemala, I would maintain that these Spanish-speaking countries have more in common than otherwise, and that they certainly share more characteristics with each other than with any other country on earth, and that there appears to be no reason to suggest that this will cease to be the case in the near future. The same, of course, applies to countries using the English language; the United States and Australia, distant and diverse though they are, have much more in common with each other than otherwise, and this will almost certainly continue to be the case for a very long time to come.

As Peter Berger emphasized, change often overrules even the more solid assumptions of cultural determinists. Switzerland used to export mercenaries, some of which are still guarding the Pope. Cultures do change, and it is fascinating to try and find out how and why this occurs. I believe that in Latin America the symptoms are there that suggest that we may be crossing the threshold of one such momentous transformation. For the first time in the history of the Spanish-speaking peoples, so many working-class Catholics acting freely, without any duress or compulsion, have embraced evangelical Protestantism. This is truly an extraordinary occurrence in a cultural tradition over which the Catholic Counter-Reformation has presided unchallenged for the past centuries. A comparison of Spain's Golden Age with the industrial modernity of the English-speaking peoples indicated that, glorious and brilliant though it was, the Spanish moment did not generate many exportable cultural artifacts. Bull-fighting did not travel well outside the empire, nor did castanets. It is even possible to think that the modified guitar (originally Persian), and the word "liberalism," may well be among its most memorable contributions. The contrast is telling with the English Industrial Revolution which has flooded the world with a tidal wave of cultural artifacts that shows no signs of abating, but which is renewed and diversified every day. Hence my comparison with the Hellenistic moment, when the known world became Hellenized at a time when Athens had decisively and permanently ceased to be a major power. There is no doubt that Latin America is adopting many of the artifacts of the industrial modernity of the English-speaking peoples, and it is not impossible that this will constitute a definitive aspect of the cultural transformation to which I have referred. Whether this growing list of cultural artifacts should also include evangelical Protestantism is a matter worthy of leisurely discussion.

**Edith Kurzweil:** Thank you. We have not yet heard from Robert

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Packenham.

**Robert Packenham:** The hedgehog-fox distinction as one big thing versus many smaller things is not the only connotation Véliz gives to his metaphor. He also says or implies that the distinction is about change-resistance versus change-acceptance; intolerance of uncertainty versus tolerance for uncertainty; uniformity of thought and values versus diversity of thought and values; hostility to risk versus risk-taking; centralism versus noncentralism; and so on. I want to suggest that there is yet another way to characterize Véliz's argument. The distinction between those who prefer certainties and uniformity of thought, avoid risk-taking, and favor centralism, on the one hand, and their opposites, on the other, is close to the distinction between illiberals and liberals. I do not know whether my point fits into the intent of Claudio's argument. But I do wish to assert that the illiberal-liberal dichotomy can be seen as fitting Véliz's examples and that indeed this may be one of the best ways to understand his argument.

When one considers *The New World of the Gothic Fox* alongside what might be called its companion volume, Véliz's earlier book, *The Centralist Tradition of Latin America,* written more than a decade earlier, one sees many parallels. Yet the big difference between them is that the earlier work stresses the political sphere more than the new one does. The latter stresses the economic and cultural spheres. As its title implies, *The Centralist Tradition of Latin America* argues that the region tends to be uncomfortable with political liberalism. *The New World of the Gothic Fox* argues that Latin America has tended historically to be uncomfortable with cultural and economic liberalism. It posits the change-resisting, diversity-resisting propensities of culture and economy in Spanish (and Portuguese) America and the innovative, pluralistic character of culture and economy in English America. Liberalism is about freedom and tolerance and creativity and diversity. Illiberal traditions and forces seek to smother them.

Putting the issue this way enables us to examine Véliz's hypotheses in terms not only of his distinctive vocabulary of hedgehogs versus foxes, Baroque versus Gothic, or solid domes versus cracked domes, but also in the context of more generic debates about liberalism versus illiberalism. Are liberal values and institutions so foreign to Latin America that efforts to use them there are distorting and "out of place"? Or is there a case for liberalism in Latin America, despite the weakness of some of the social, economic, and cultural conditions that may be necessary to make liberalism work? Has U.S. influence, rooted in U.S. liberal values, been a

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conservative, change-resisting, even reactionary force in Latin America, or a force for change, democracy, and human rights? Or both? Are the answers to these questions the same or different when one focuses on U.S. government action and when one focuses on U.S. economic and cultural activities, which are mainly in the private sector?

Véliz's book on the centralist tradition suggested that liberalism was out of place in Latin America. Moreover, when it appeared in 1980 the facts – the predominance of authoritarian regimes even in countries such as Chile or Uruguay that had democratic traditions – seemed to be with him. As he wrote then, "I am convinced that the proliferation of authoritarian regimes during the past few years is not an aberration of moral and political taste, but a manifestation of a style of political behavior, a secular disposition of Latin American society that under different forms – of which the military may prove the most transient – will be with us for some time yet."

Today, fourteen years later, except for Cuba, virtually every Latin American country is much closer to having a democratic regime than it was in 1980. Never before has so much of Latin America been ruled democratically. To be sure, in varying degrees and ways these democratic regimes are imperfect and precarious. The so-called third wave of democracy may recede, leaving who knows what. But at the political level liberalism does appear to be more feasible and desirable now than it did in 1980, and one sees this more clearly through a universalistic perspective, rather than using Véliz's rich but more idiosyncratic one. Of course, let it be conceded that to say which perspective is clearer is not necessarily to say which is truer.

Véliz's earlier book has relatively little to say about the influence of the U.S. government as either a conservative or a change-promoting force in Latin America. It has more to say about the alleged influence of U.S. and other First World intellectuals in setting the agenda for these countries and determining the prestige hierarchies of Latin American intellectuals. Indeed, from that book alone one might judge that the biggest influence the U.S. had on Latin America was that of its radical intellectuals on Latin American intellectuals. I would say much more about the ways the Latin American intellectuals influenced North American intellectuals, and even officials. I would also give more weight than Véliz does to the influences of the U.S. government in both change-resisting, illiberal directions and in change-promoting, liberal directions, in Latin American development.

But if Véliz did not perceive the degree to which liberal politics could sprout from Latin American soils in the eighties and nineties, neither did much of the U.S. social-science scholarship on the region.

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Whereas Véliz saw the main obstacle to be the Latin American centralist tradition, many U.S. social scientists saw the main obstacles to be revolutionary potentialities in Latin America and anti-revolutionary and anti-liberal impulses in U.S. policies toward the region. None of these putative obstacles has so far proved to be decisive. Liberal politics continue. The Latin American revolutionary movements, which U.S. social scientists thought the end of the Cold War would allow to emerge unfettered from U.S. opposition, have not appeared. On this point Véliz had better insight than most U.S. scholars. The change-resisting side of the U.S. government orientation toward Latin America that existed during the Cold War, and that social scientists predicted would continue after it ended, has in fact largely disappeared, replaced by a combination of benign neglect and reliance on the private sector.

Like the earlier volume, Véliz's new book stresses continuity more than change. But its final chapter, "The Crumbling Dome," is diffferent. It argues that the old Latin American Baroque dome – monolithic, conformist, illiberal – is "crumbling" under the impact of blue jeans, computer graphics, jogging shoes, electric toasters, credit cards, T-shirts, dishwashing machines, hamburgers, rock music, Coca-Cola, supermarket bar code readers, volleyball, color television, hot dogs, and pizza parlors, among other wrecking balls.

Nevertheless, Véliz's new book as a whole and even its final chapter are a bit ambiguous about exactly what the status of the dome in Latin America is *now*. There are statements that imply the end is at hand: "the domed view of things appears finally to have lost respectability in the world at large and possibly to have exhausted the patience even of its more loyal Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking supporters in the New World." The extraordinary success of Protestantism is seen as "the most visible occurrence of the penultimate stages of a lengthy process of disillusionment" with, presumably, not only Roman Catholicism but also the whole illiberal Hispanic Baroque tradition. At the same time, we are told that the edifice, though crumbling, "is still there" and that "the constraints of the centralist order" remain "a chief impediment to the creative processes that are at the heart of industrial modernity." Similarly, Véliz suggests that it is the Latin American region's traditional illiberalisms – the dome still intact – which leave it with "waning . . . economic prosperity" and "a middling social and political existence."

The "cracking of the dome" in all of Latin America is a massive topic. Certainly, as Véliz says, the last few years have been a body blow to the statist traditions of public policy in Latin America. But at the level of everyday culture the changes are not necessarily so great. By ev-

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cryday culture I mean marketplace, firm, and property transactions, bidding practices, courtroom activities, bureaucratic activities of many kinds, tax practices, parking tickets, permits, licenses, hiring and promotion practices, family relations, and other patterns of daily professional, commercial, and personal interactions. At these levels the traditions Véliz discusses in most of his book may well be continuing more strongly than he allows in his last chapter. In other words, at this level of everyday culture there still may be more validity to Véliz's thesis than he himself seems to be acknowledging. He argues, "The ramparts . . . have now been breached, not by outsiders fighting to get in, but by very large numbers of insiders trekking out in the direction of supermarkets and shopping centers." That is largely true, but many economic, legal, political, administrative, and social institutions, practices, and values in Latin America have not necessarily made the transition to the market and the private sector so fully as Véliz's image may suggest. Neither have Latin American intellectuals nor North American ones interpreting Latin America made such a transition. Indeed, while many more of them are now reconciled to political liberalism, they are still largely hostile to economic and cultural liberalism.

The final chapter raises another question that deserves more attention. Given Véliz's thesis about cultural continuities, why has change suddenly occurred now? Why not earlier? Or later? I do not see in Véliz's argument a way to recognize that change is in the offing until after it has happened. He explains Latin American continuity but not Latin American change. Similar questions also arise with respect to England. There Véliz posits the continuum of a propensity for many small changes; a sharp divergence from that pattern would occur, then, if such a propensity were sharply to diminish. Thus Véliz writes of "the unleashing by the English Industrial Revolution of the greatest process of transformation in human history." English society was, he writes, "the result of endless alteration," and he quotes approvingly Ernest Gellner's description of it as "the only society ever to live by and rely on sustained and perpetual growth . . . the first society to invent the concept and idea of progress, of continuous improvement." But has the alteration been endless in England? Has its growth been perpetual, its improvement continuous? Clearly, they have not. The question is, therefore, why has England become less an agent for change than it once was? Earlier Véliz acknowledges, "The Industrial Revolution that was born in England now resides in the United States . . ." This is true, and it leads him to what I view as his most interesting and provocative points.

Chapter Seven, "A World Made in English," has the freshest and potentially most important argument (and also one of the most debatable

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and least fashionable ones.) Basically, Véliz maintains that the Industrial Revolution born in England and now residing in the United States is not near its end but at its midpoint: "We are not elsewhere but in the middle of an English Industrial Revolution that is scarcely more than two centuries old and shows no symptoms of weakness or decline." Moreover, "the possibility of [the] metropolitan center [of this Industrial Revolution] emigrating elsewhere [i.e., from the U.S.] in the foreseeable future is virtually insignificant." This appears to be at least implicitly an argument against Yale historian Paul Kennedy's notion of the decline of U.S. influence, and it is explicitly set off against the view expressed in 1989 by Derek Bok, that the United States is now "in the early stages of a long decline like that of Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century which continues to the present day."

The Kennedy-Bok view is what some like to call "the received wisdom"; Véliz challenges it head-on, contending that what was most distinctive about the English Industrial Revolution now flourishing vigorously in the U.S. is its creativity, its capacity to nourish and encourage the continuing innovation of cultural and economic activities, ideas, and products that have appeal throughout the entire world. It is this capacity to create what people everywhere want, he says, that enables the U.S. to meet the challenges from countries such as Japan and other Asian Tigers (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong). The latter are spectacular at adapting and organizing but not in innovating. To support this argument, Véliz provides an avalanche of diverse and often novel examples: sports, movies, cartoons, Safeways, the TV program *Dallas,* automobiles, freeways, suburbs, McDonald's, skyscrapers, airlines, and the vast complex of activities associated with them, credit cards, laundromats, and, last but not least, "Happy Birthday to You," "the most often performed song on earth," which was first published in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1893. It is hard to refute his contention that no other country has been or is so innovative across so many fields of human endeavor in ways that appeal to so many people, places, and cultures worldwide. And if, along the way, Véliz the Chilean can embellish his argument with a few gentle, playful digs at mother country Spain or friendly neighborhood rival Argentina, so much the better for him.

I am not surprised that the reviews of his book which I have seen so far have ignored this particular argument. Not only is it novel, it is also politically incorrect. However, there also are legitimate questions to raise about Véliz's thesis. Does he overvalue consumerism and commerce and undervalue aesthetic and interpersonal considerations? Does he neglect phenomena that do in fact support a picture of the "U.S. in decline,"

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particularly in the social sphere: growing socioeconomic inequalities, illiteracy, crime rates, and prison populations; crises in welfare systems, families, and ethnic relations; and so on? Have not real wages for some economic sectors been stagnant, and for others declining, for two decades? Are not many indicators of educational quality worsening? Is it not possible, as some thoughtful and informed people think, that the decline in quality of elite culture and popular education through political correctness and other factors is deep and profoundly damaging?

It is also interesting to note that an intellectual style broadly similar to Véliz's can be, indeed has been, used to argue almost the opposite case from his, or at least a very different one. The North American historian Richard Morse has written a book, *El espejo de Próspero: Un estudio de la dialéctica del Nuevo Mundo* (*Prospero's Mirror: A Study in New World Dialectics*) that, among other things, makes a case for the value, resilience, and durability of Latin American cultural, social, and political traditions in contrast to what he sees as the bureaucratic routinization, invasiveness, and superficiality of their North American counterparts. Thus Morse writes of the "avalanching intrusion" into the lives of Anglo-Americans of "computers, parking stickers and tickets, parking meters and meter maids, no-smoking zones and loading zones, incompetent receptionists and competent police dogs, office hours, coffee and sex breaks, zip and area codes . . . this whole *cauchemar,* which can be synthesized as 'smile' buttons to wear and 'hold' buttons to push (or, less hypocritically, as 'curb your dog–and yourself with it'), is for the 'convenience' and 'protection' of the customer."

Although Morse is amusing and provocative, on balance Véliz's insight about the U.S. case seems to me to be the more accurate and useful one. Véliz's perception may be optimistic and partial, but it provides an important angle of vision for assessing contemporary North American culture and economy. Stop lights and stop signs are worth having and observing; safety belts are worth using; they make us better not worse off; they humanize more than they dehumanize.

If Véliz is perhaps a bit too optimistic about English America he may also be a bit too pessimistic about Hispanic America. For there really is a revolution, with a small "r," going on in Latin America's economic policies. Ten years ago, no one imagined or predicted what is now happening. Of course, we will have to wait and see how long it lasts and how deep it goes.

**Edith Kurzweil:** Thank you very much. We will go right on to Irving Louis Horowitz.

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**Irving Louis Horowitz:** I actually saw *The New World of the Gothic Fox* in its early stages, when it was sent to Transaction Publishers for consideration. Our editorial board, with unstinting support, liked the manuscript a great deal. That said, we lost out on the bidding to the University of California Press and its director, James H. Clark. They are to be commended for publishing this provocative work. Claudio has worked over the materials tremendously during the last fourteen years to make the final product brilliant in substance and pellucid in style.

Let me segue into Claudio's book by a random recollection of a conversation I had when I was re-reading the book in its final form. While in Buenos Aires in the late 1950s, I was walking along Retiro Plaza with a good friend, Hernan Rodriguez, who served as translator for my lectures on the sociology of knowledge and scientific sociology for the Buenos Aires branch of the French publisher, Hachette. We walked by the statue depicting the departure of the English in 1810 and the triumph of the national system over the Spanish royalists in 1816. My colleague said: "Look at this monument. It illustrates the great tragedy of Argentina. We got rid of the Spanish politicians but kept their corrupt culture. We should have at least kept the English language if not the British troops. The wrong people were forced to leave." This bitter-sweet comment from an Argentine nationalist came flooding back to my mind in re-examining Claudio's book.

Quite beyond stream of consciousness reflections, Claudio's book is based on solid research. It is an extension of Max Weber's thought about the impact of the Protestant Reformation on entrepreneurial economies; or, if you will, the economic advantages of that Reformation vis-à-vis other societies that either failed to experience the rising tide of Northern European development, or more pointedly, rejected such linkages. *The New World of the Gothic Fox* offers a crucial subtext about the inversion of the Marxist notion of economic base and cultural superstructure. The implication throughout is how cultural formations - from the nature of legal scaffolds to the character of language – generate the successful accommodation of the social system to new structures and new possibilities for change. That Claudio's preferences are clearly with Montesquieu in law and Tocqueville in custom does not blind him to the unique position of English empiricism in philosophy, constitutionalism in law, and utilitarianism in economy. The evolution of Western Civilization took shape as much, if not more, because of the British impact than that of Germany, France or Italy. This pre-eminence grew as industrialism displaced agrarianism. The military

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victories of England over Spain merely consecrated in battle what had already taken place in the economic realm.

At times Claudio's book launches into a basic critique of historicism, Hispanicism, and dependency theory directly, if not always sequentially. Claudio expresses an aversion for reductionism and contempt for victimology as a national style. He sees these assorted isms - correctly in my view - as little else than apologetics rather than explanations for the failure of Latin America to keep pace.

His work is further distinguished by an avoidance of anti-Americanism, and no less novel in these days of anti-WASP rhetoric, an avoidance of anti-British sentiments as well. Claudio is aware of the bastions which he is storming, assaulting might be more appropriate. He is aware of the risks he is running. It is not easy for someone with a deep commitment to, as well as background in, South American culture to write a book like this. It is an act of political courage, which is a precious commodity in intellectual life, and hence should be unabashedly celebrated. Now I should like to move into some details of *The New World of the Gothic Fox* that make it a book of truly classic dimensions.

Claudio perceives how the centrality of language, laws and customs led to modern concerns. He offers a fascinating analysis of how the counter-position of the structure of Napoleonic law led to its differentiation from the common law structure of British and American law. The disastrous infusion of Bonapartism solidified this counter position throughout South America. I would add to his legal observations that in the English language there is a strong differentiation made between that which is morally right and that which is legally sanctioned. In other European languages there is a pleasant ambiguity about "right" and "wrong" in the linguistic expression of legal concepts. Words like *recht, droit, derecho,* can be used almost interchangeably in empirical and ethical matters. This clearly is not the case in the English language. This is important beyond formalist considerations; reflecting as it does the fact that English law emphasizes the sense of individual responsibility. This involves more than the concept of being right in the epistemic sense; it entails what we are obligated to do in the ethical sense.

Claudio possesses an Oakeshott-like notion of obligation as part of the armor of the free person. This sharp distinction between right and law leads us to consider other profound characteristic differences between North American and Latin American culture, such as the different interpretations of "winning" and "losing." In Latin America, there is invested in the concept of winning its significance to national status. This

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carries well beyond the sports arena that Claudio deals with. How does custom play out in a world in which winning or losing is a natural extension of a "game" as in Anglo-American culture, in contrast to a world in which winning or losing is "life" itself - a definition of personal worth. We see how in close elections this difference plays out: they are rarely contested in the Anglo tradition, nearly always contested in the Latin tradition.

Another topic in *The New World of the Gothic Fox* that merits close attention is the concept of post-industrialism: Claudio is not entirely happy with Daniel Bell's formulation of post-industrialism, especially the idea that North American culture emphasizes desires or wants rather than real needs. But beyond this, we have the question of whether industrialism itself outstrips the needs of people. As Véliz argues, the level of development is so high, the amount of consumer satisfaction is so great, that North American society is on a different, and presumably higher, level. I prefer to call this a cognitive style, a social order in which the holders of power (rarely spoken of by Claudio) have to make people want something different from what they already have, even if what they have is satisfactory. Fashion designers have to make a woman want to change her clothing from one year to another; automobile dealers have to make people buy cars whether the ones they have are obsolete or not; soft drink manufacturers must convince people to increase their intake of sugar beverages. In short, advanced post-industrial societies seem to be hell bent to move people away from what they need to what they want. More bluntly, it is a cultural movement away from affluence as such to raw avarice. Indeed, the challenge of marketing and advertising in a post-industrial world is to make people want even what they may be highly resistant to own or use.

These initiatives suggest that there is a certain kind of decadence involved in a marketing environment or a system of advanced capitalism, in which the requirements of the society are not really any longer at stake, so much as the need to move merchandise. To what degree is this a positive or a negative feature of modern societies? Claudio does not quite come up with an answer, his dismissal of Bell notwithstanding. I might add, too, that this post industrialism without equity may be a growing problem in Latin American culture, especially its urbanized middle sectors. One would like to learn how Claudio views such developments which clearly are less attractive than a simple recitation of fiscal budgets and consumer satisfactions in advanced systems.

In *The New World of the Gothic Fox*, modernity is constructed as having a predominantly Anglo-American character. But were Claudio to

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focus on modernity as having a non-Anglo-American character, where the democratic ethic is less pronounced as a feature of advancing capitalism, where the question of democracy has been thwarted, then modernity does not look quite as attractive. For example, in its Germanic form under Nazism, in a system of military politics that was responsible for millions of arbitrary deaths, the spread of industrial life hardly appears appetizing, especially in retrospect. Nor does the situation look brighter in its industrial socialist form, in its Soviet form. Marxism-Leninism is after all a postmodernist heresy; its genocides were responsible for an even greater number of deaths than those caused by the Nazis. It is but small consolation that the Soviets had a much longer time span to work their postmodernist miracles.

There is a Continental frame of reference for modernity which strikes me as less attractive than the Anglo-American framework utilized by Véliz. I do not agree with Zygmunt Baumann in thinking that modernity is at the heart of the genocide of the Holocaust. On the other hand, it is hard to deny that huge misery has resulted because of a realized technified type of modernity. The emergence of advanced economies make possible advanced technologies. These in turn permit incredible damage to be inflicted on ordinary lives and ordinary institutions. Just how one disengages the positive values of modernity from the negative potentials of modernity is a problem that needs to be addressed with far more detail and skill than one finds in Claudio's book. Further, the reader is never entirely sure of when Claudio is talking about *modern* values and when he is talking about *democratic* values. Modernity and democracy are not necessarily isomorphic every step of the historical road from barbarism into the brave new world. Indeed, new forms of barbarism should occasion some pause on the great road into the future.

Let me illustrate this point in individual, admittedly hypothetical terms. Let us pretend that we are sitting in a railway station in 1938, and we have a choice of a ticket to Rome, to Moscow, or to Berlin. You have a fascist regime, a Communist regime, and a Nazi regime to choose among. Let us also presume - a big presumption to be sure - that we have sufficient foreknowledge of the outcomes of these three regimes to make an intelligent decision. We have to select among two more or less modern versions of totalitarianism, and one Latin or traditional version. Your decision is further influenced by the fact you have a wife and family. Where do you go? Unless one is a hidebound and foolish social or political scientist, or for that matter, fanatic ideologue, you take your family and go directly to Rome. One does not elect to go to the most

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modern or most industrial city or nation; one certainly does not go to a system that declares itself to be beyond the evils of capitalism. One goes to where one can be safe - pure and simple.

These are not small matters. These concerns are not simply metaphorical or casual narrative sentences. There are policy implications in human decisions at the bottom no less than at the top. It is estimated that under Mussolini fewer than one thousand political prisoners were killed. Of course, many were incarcerated; fascists made life for the opposition unpleasant and unhappy. But compared with Berlin under Hitler, or Moscow under Stalin, the record of misery is infinitely less onerous. This supports the idea that culture is a variable unto itself, and cannot be reduced to economy. I sense that Claudio is of two minds on this issue: he wants to emphasize the Anglo-American social system as a culture; but in linking it to industrial capitalism and beyond, he is also pointing to Latin America and saying: do thou likewise.

Today, the Latin American countries have developed a different political tradition, in which political enemies can go into exile rather than be annihilated. It is a tradition of violence at some level but relatively mild in terms of ultimate taking of lives. The line between Spain, Portugal and Italy in the European world and Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in the New World should be dealt with in a more nuanced manner. We are talking in relative terms. I am not saying there were not "disappeared" people in Buenos Aires in 1978 and 1983; I realize that the Cuban prisons are filled to the limit; I understand well the awful nature of even mild tyrannies. But on overview, if we look back at the century now drawing to a close, there has to be a recognition of a choice of evils, no less than a selection of goods. This is true for political systems no less than for cultural traditions and economic formations.

Although Claudio's book does indicate the differences among the countries of Latin America: between Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico on the one hand, and let us say, Panama, Peru and Bolivia on the other, we need to look more closely at why such micro differences matter in the macro management of societies. The gap in levels of development at the start of the twentieth century between Argentina and the United States was far narrower than it is at the close of the century. Why should this be the case? Part of the answer may reside in the celebration of traditionalism over modernism. But this is only a partial explanation. We are not dealing simply with backwardness as such, or Latinism as such, or cultural styles as such. We are dealing with differences of economic potential among Latin American countries – in contrast to Brazil, which is a twenty-first century dynamo, Haiti is a nineteenth-century basket case. We can't talk about this in 1994 without

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coming to terms with the fact that Brazil is one of the top ten countries of the world right now, the eighth best producing nation of military hardware for export. The same can be said of Mexico, Chile and Argentina, which for all their problems, show every sign of becoming modern in the sense of economy, without entirely forfeiting cultural claims to uniqueness. We are dealing with a country that is a powerhouse. This is quite different from a Haiti or a Honduras, for example. Painting the region with the broad cultural brush of being "Latin" really does not help in describing the Brazilian world, which is an empire unto itself, with traditions unto itself. Claudio is very well aware of this, because he has developed a theory of exceptionalism within the context of his own work, in which Chile becomes an exceptional model, as does Argentina as well.

My final question is, to what degree is the model itself subject to revision in a macro way, and to what degree is the exception the norm or the rule? Again, this strikes me as something which bears further investigation. Cultural forms may indeed advance or inhibit economic growth and political freedom. But I suspect that they continue to play out on a canvas that is ever-changing. The Catholic Church in nation after nation in Latin America has adapted over time to changing circumstances - often less fortunate than in the past. To what extent are such modes of adaptation autonomous and independent of economic policies is hard to determine.

Another important distinction is that we should identify not only the national structures, but the urban structures. When one goes to Sao Paulo or Santiago de Chile, or Buenos Aires, one enters an entirely modern world. The world of folklorism and cultural tradition may well be reduced to a few night club spots for unwitting tourists. In fact, what is so astonishing is how abrupt that world comes to an end when one leaves - not the national context but the urban one.

To what degree are we dealing here with a phenomenon that may parallel what Claudio is discussing, but is not quite the same: an urban structure which has not been able to generate a network around the country and develop what you might call inter-urban regional development, such as one finds in the United States? Why, for example, is it that in the United States we have an entire network of connected urban centers, while in Latin America we find high coastal development, poor interior development? North America went West, while Latin America went back to Europe. Was this a function of the economic ambitions of European colonial powers? Why was the synapse not broken long after independence? The play of culture and economy that Claudio draws our attention to is still an area that requires much

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analysis. The work of people like D'Arcy Ribeiro, for example, needs to be recognized as an alternative to Claudio Véliz's kind of analysis. That is, we need to be aware that people working within the same general traditions of cultural determination may arrive at profoundly different judgments as to the past and future, no less than present. For at issue is not simply a pleasant dichotomy of advanced and stagnant cultures, but how to stimulate growth and hence advance parity between nations and peoples.

We may be dealing with more than a problem of capitalism. We may be dealing with more than a problem of urbanism. Yet I do not see that sensibility of national structures emphasized in *The New World of the Gothic Fox*. Between the nations of Latin America there are tremendous contradictions between wealthy and poor states. And within each of these nations, there are likewise large-scale contradictions between modernity and folklorism; between the images of mythology in the interior, and the sense of the whole nation characteristic of capital regions. Somehow these factors have to be balanced and accounted for if an analysis on the scale Claudio proposes can be made to work. I think it can be done, and I think Claudio is very much on the right track.

Finally, I am concerned about a set of distinctions that I feel should have been addressed in greater depth in *The New World of The Gothic Fox*. We too often talk about civilianism and democracy as if they were similar. I have grave doubts that civilianism and democracy are identical. We have many civilian governments in Latin America; regimes that profess a commitment to modern, free enterprise economies. But we have far fewer democratic societies; societies in which the rule of law prevails. Claudio's book would have been sharpened tremendously by making the distinction between democratic orders and civilian orders. Civilianism does not imply democratic order; only that forms of coercion are subdued and wait in the wings as a threat of worse conditions to come.

There is also a question which has been roiling throughout the hemisphere: whether there even is such an entity as "nationalism." To what degree is nationalism a more powerful force in Latin American culture and thought than we perceive it to be? How many people feel "Latin" in Paraguay? It goes without saying that Brazilians have a quite different sense of the Latin complex by virtue of their Portuguese inheritance. How many people in Ecuador are kindly disposed to Peru - especially in an era of constant border warfare between the two - and would dare to cite Bolivarism as a common thread? Even two nations inhabitating the same island, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, are so

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distinct as to make the gulf between the aforementioned nations pale in comparison. In short, the notion of Latin America itself must be explored as perhaps little more than a convention, if not an invention.

You will feel the bitterness of Indians toward Brazilian settlers; of native Portenos for Italian migrants in Argentina, of peasants from Chiapas for bourgeois of the Capital Federal, etc. The notion of a shared cultural agenda may exist, but only as a remote and distant consideration. In this, perhaps Claudio is more the intellectual than he imagines; or better, less a student of Latin actualities than he imagines. The array of questions: global, national, and regional, remain. How do they play out on specific cultural canvases? How can one make predictions about the behavior of nations within this context much less policies for a region writ large?

Finally, we must consider the distinction between capitalism and developmentalism. Even in the post-Soviet, post-socialist world, the bureaucratic administrative state does not necessarily require a Smithian or Keynesian environment to survive. There is a great deal of "top-down" activity in Latin American life that has little to do with entrepreneurial drives, and much to do about statism. The struggle about whether to maintain traditional cultural forms, or adopt modern forms, may be a side-show. While we sit and discuss the modern economy in a cultural context, the politicians and savants of these countries are compelled to take up more urgent questions about the relation of developmental impulses to bureaucratic structures. Again, this might well be the next round - we have gotten beyond raw militarism in the region, but not so refined culturalism. That may take place. But for the moment, the examination of Latin America pathways to development are less lofty, even less noble than the course outlined in Claudio's book.

These comments made, overall Claudio has struck on tremendously important and sensitive issues. His work may make some chauvinists quite angry because he is so close to the marrow. His work is not unlike responses to Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China.* Why does science not develop, or atrophy, in China after the modern period of discovery and invention begins in the West? Claudio has every right to raise fundamental questions: Why, if the Western hemisphere has such wide commonalties, do its nations and cultures have such disparate outcomes? There are going to be people who are unnerved by this book. For if his work will prove disturbing to traditionalists for whom Latin America is a dream unfulfilled and pure, it will be no less unnerving for those modernists who are convinced that the North American idea is *sui generis* and cannot be transmitted or transposed. One hopes however

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that there will be an even larger number who are stimulated by this synthesis between the old fashioned *pensador* of Latin America, and the new-fangled social scientist of North America and Europe. Indeed, I suspect that in this fusion of cultural types Claudio will find his greatest sense of intellectual satisfaction.

**Claudio Véliz:** Thank you very much. That was very generous and helpful. Let me begin by commenting that one of your observations, which is conterminous with what Professor Packenham was just saying, about the transition from militarism to liberalism, and then on to civilian administrations, must include a reference to our important tradition of political authoritarianism. Mexico has had a very civilian single party sytem since 1929, which is now - so we are told – about to be reformed decisively. No matter. This is essentially an authoritarian civilian regime well-nourished by the robust centralist tradition characteristic of the centuries of colonial rule; it is not a military but a civilian authoritarian regime, of which Philip II as well as Porfirio Diaz would have approved heartily. Is President Menem a "liberal"? What does "liberal" mean in this context? The Argentine presidency is very powerful, and its power is consistent both with its political tradition and its constitutional arrangements. The dichotomy that presents democracy and militarism as the only alternatives is misguided. It is better, and more realistic, I believe, to reserve primacy of place for what we can helpfully describe as an authoritarian style of government, which is as convincing and pervasive under civilian control as it can be when donning its post-Napoleonic and populist military guise.

To return to Professor Packenham's observations about the Latin American continuities and the "crumbling dome": At the risk of mixing my metaphors hopelessly, let me explain that what I had in mind is closer to the mending of Sigfried's sword than to anything else. You may remember that in Wagner's *Ring,* the dwarf Mime failed repeatedly to weld the two pieces into which Wotan had broken the sword Nothung. It was Sigfried who solved the problem by destroying the sword, as it were, filing both pieces and then melting the pile of filings and forging a new sword. I do not wish to sound excessively revolutionary, but I think that for Latin America truly to transform itself, it must first turn its back on a tradition of central control that informs virtually everything that has occurred in the region during the past five centuries. This will not be easy as long as the hope remains alive that the traditional centralist arrangements – the broken pieces of the sword

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Nothung – can be made to serve. We change less than we think; there are very few transformations in history that result in truly overwhelming change. There was a French Revolution, but the day-to-day existence of the immense majority of the French people changed only marginally from what it had been during the previous century. The changes were significant, but the continuities were even more so. This certainly applies to Latin America, where the continuities have proved vastly more telling than the changes. Notwithstanding revolutions, civil wars, and economic depressions, the proportion of persons bearing recognizable names that place them in the upper strata of society is higher, say, in Colombia and Chile, than anywhere else in the Western world.

I agree with you that this is so, but my main interest is with the discontinuities that, it seems to me, are surfacing everywhere in the region and may suggest that we are on the threshold of a momentous process of change. The most important, I think, is the mass conversion of working-class Catholics to evangelical Protestantism. This is without precedent in the Catholic world; it is certainly the largest number of conversions to Protestantism since the Reformation, and it marks a decisive departure from a unifying centralist tradition that acquired its definitive character from the Spanish Counter-Reformation. It is possible that what Latin American converts are embracing today is a form of "cargo cult." They are unlikely to be converting because having reread Luther or Calvin, they found their explanations more plausible than those offered by Balmes or Maritain. It is far more likely that they feel that they are embracing an austere and economically rewarding system of belief linked functionally with modern industrial prosperity, and distant from the persistent failures of the political activism and terrorist violence associated with the teachings of the Catholic theologians of liberation.

Yes, thank you for bringing up the point made in my Chapter Seven, on the crucial role of the United States. This is very helpful. You may have noticed that in his otherwise encouraging review, Professor J. H. Elliott, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration, missed this aspect altogether. The book is not about us, Spanish-speaking hedgehogs, but mainly about you, the English-speaking foxes of industrial modernity. This, I thought, was abundantly reflected in the title, but Professor Elliott missed it. With respect to this, I should say that I am puzzled that my attempt also appears to have failed to move the discussion of Latin America out of its traditional academic ghetto of "Latin American Studies," and on to the wider stage, precisely by comparing the Spanish- and the English-speaking peoples. Of course the Industrial Revolution is not over. The evidence for this is overwhelming. Today there are more human beings, in absolute as well as in relative terms,

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than ever before since the beginning of industrialism in the eighteenth century, who want desperately to be embraced by the prosperities of industrial modernity. They may or may not understand precisely what this entails, but there is no doubt that it is what they want. This lends itself to caricature. An overweight industrial capitalist who sleeps badly, is in need of exercise and spends a fortune in medical attention, goes to Paraguay and has a chat with a local peasant: "My good man, how I envy you. You rise with the sun, work close to Mother Earth all day long, arrive home tired, go to bed and sleep soundly. No alcohol problem, no drugs, no expensive diets, no crime in the streets, no stress, no traffic congestion. Heavens above, how I envy you." To which the peasant has only one reply, worthy of Sancho Panza: "Buddy, let's change places."

An excessive emphasis on the melancholy plight of the urban poor, or the overwhelming vulgarity of many consumer goods, or the excesses of a free market system that can deliver ephemeral rubbish as well as lasting prosperity, may blind us to the realization that huge numbers of our fellow human beings are quite undeterred by these tales of woe and happy to take the plunge and emigrate to the countries afflicted by these ills. Latin Americans have a keen appreciation of the value of family relationships, friendship, regional loyalties, and the like; *Gemeinschaft* community is well and alive south of the border, especially in Mexico and the Caribbean, and yet thousands upon thousands are willing to risk life and limb to try and enter the United States where, we know, these *Gemeinschaft* traits are among the very first casualties of industrial modernity. Would we have it otherwise? Of course. We would not be human if we did not at least try to secure the material benefits of industrialism without relinquishing any of the values of traditional community, but we have been trying to do this for many decades, with indifferent results.

**Robert Packenham:** Barbara Ward, the British economist, wrote an article in the *New York Times Magazine* about thirty years ago, titled, "We May Be Rich, But They Are Happy," about the third-world poor. Her article is an excellent example of the kind of thinking you're describing.

**Claudio Véliz:** This is an option that exists only in the minds of intellectuals, who enjoy the mobility and liminality denied to those who live, as it were, in the hinterland, and who are willing to leave everything behind and cross the Rio Grande or brave the Caribbean in flimsy rafts to get to the promised land.

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Your point about sports is well taken. There are three words in the cultural tradition of the English-speaking people that have attained universal acceptance, although they have also proved absolutely untranslatable; these are *sport, club,* and *hobby*. They not only speak volumes about the style of the Gothic fox, but they are also an integral part of the foundation of the cultural edifice that the English-speaking peoples constructed in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. This style of the Gothic fox can also be perceived in the manner in which the Spanish language is being transformed and assimilated in parts of the English-speaking world, where words such as *marqueta* and *aparcar* have replaced *mercado* and *estacionar*. It is ironic that the descriptive name "Spanglish" should be used to define what passes for Spanish in California, Florida, and New York. The irony is that the adulteration of spelling and syntaxis, and the abandonment of all grammatical decorum are only possible because this variety of pidgin exists under the shelter of the Gothic fox. Every time they open their mouths, the users of "Spanglish" announce that they have embraced the cultural habits and disposition of their English-speaking hosts, and to prove it, they regale their listeners with the tattered, pitiful remains of the language they inherited from Nebrija, Cervantes, and Unamuno.

To extend the point about sports: There is a quantitative aspect that ought not to be ignored. We must not forget that basketball and volleyball, both invented here in Massachusetts, in the Springfield and Holyoke YMCA about a century ago, are today the two most popular social activities in China. More Chinese play basketball and volleyball than there were inhabitants in the United States when these games were invented. What are we to say of the numbers of Latin Americans who play soccer? And what of the popularity of rugby in the south of France and soccer in the north? Of course France is an advanced and immensely sophisticated nation, but no one could possibly argue that the universal acceptance by the French of two games invented at Rugby School during Dr. Arnold's headmastership is due to duress, or to imperial preponderance, on the part of Mr. Gladstone.

About the wealth of Argentina during the last century: Yes, of course. Not only Argentina, but Chile as well, and the rest of the Latin American republics, and for most of the past five centuries. It is possibly true to say that Latin America is the largest region of the modern world to enjoy such riches without major interruptions and for such a long time. But we must not confuse wealth with industrial modernity. Latin America has always been rich in primary commodities. The world has never seen such a torrential flood of gold and silver as the one that fol-

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lowed the conquest and settlement of the sixteenth century. But it was at the end of the colonial period, in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, that the Indies reached their highest level of imperial prosperity, and this may well have contributed to the vigor and ultimate success of the secessionist revolution of independence. What's more, during the nineteenth century the new republics of Latin America supplied the growing markets of the industrializing northern hemisphere with every conceivable primary commodity, from beef and skins, to minerals, sugar and wheat, to precious metals, wool, nitrate of soda, coffee and bananas.

The income from these booming sales was dissipated in urban embellishments, good opera, and better living. None of these countries industrialized, mainly because there was no need for them to do so. The wealth from the export of commodities more than sufficed to ensure a solid standard of living for those in a position to have an opinion on the matter, and this situation did not change until the boundary of the Great Depression of 1929 had been crossed. After the catastrophe, more keenly and bitterly felt in Latin America than anywhere else, the decision for the central state to take the initiative in the process of industrialization was adopted with an enthusiasm that made the subsequent disappointment all the more painful and embarrassing. The uneven distribution of wealth does not attenuate the fact of the secular prosperity of Latin America. This cannot be a good argument. Today some see evidence of a declining American economy in the problems of urban poverty, crime, drug abuse, and the like. This is only partly relevant. The presence of beggars in the streets of New York and Washington does not diminish the fact of the overwhelming preponderance of the United States in the world economy. If one adds up the economic clout of Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, the result is impressive, even though not every American is enabled to enjoy the resulting prosperity.

**Peter Berger:** Well you know in my house I have a shrine to Max Weber and two slightly smaller ones to Durkheim and Simmel. I'm almost ready to add one of Claudio. But let me slightly, mildly, question one concept of his which I think is central, the Hellenistic one. And let me also add intellectual exports to the discussion. Yes, there is a veneer of habits and lifestyles, powerful, significant, but isn't there something else? Isn't there also a non-Hellenistic culture at the same time in which people participate in multiple ways?

Let me evoke an image from my own memory. When a few years ago I was in Japan under the auspices of the Shinto Kokugakuin

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University, I found myself trapped in a truly archaic ceremony honoring the Meiji Emperor. After the ceremony we walked outside, where there was a gigantic park, a gathering place of literally thousands of teenagers, with all the accoutrements of the West. I asked my hosts, isn't there a contradiction here? They said, absolutely not. One of the ingenious things about Japanese culture has always been that people can do very different things at different times and yet it somehow has a unity. It's not exclusively a Japanese trait; I think we all participate in culture on multiple levels. One of them may be the English culture you note, but there are others. There are different modernities.

What you are saying in a way is, one cannot wear jeans "innocently." I am raising the possibility that one may wear jeans "innocently," and yet die for Allah.

**Claudio Véliz:** One person may wear jeans innocently, but millions may not.

**Peter Berger:** I'm not questioning the massiveness of it, but I'm questioning the seamlessness of the web you have constructed. Is it not possible to differentiate?

**Claudio Véliz:** Of course it is possible. As Dr. Arias Calderón pointed out earlier, culture systems are like less or more complex systems of eccentric wheels, turning at different levels and at different speeds, with each of us in the place on the axis. There are levels that are less obvious and possibly more important than hamburgers, bubble-gum, and jogging shoes. When I referred to religion in my book on the centralist tradition of Latin America, for example, I observed that the largest non-Catholic minority in Latin America, including non-believers, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and others, amounted to less than seven percent of the population. Evidently a very great change has taken place here, with the massive conversions to evangelical Protestantism that have taken place during the past few years. The same is true of the discarding of the apparatus of the state as the bearer of the principal responsibility for the economic life of these countries. Had anyone asked me, in 1980, whether it was possible for Argentina to privatize her state-owned telephone system, I would have replied that this was absolutely impossible. There is no doubt that important changes are taking place at the most significant levels of the cultural tradition.

We had a *conversazione* here a few months ago, on "The Worth of Nations," which considered some of these themes and which strength-

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ened my skepticism about the global arguments. Although much of what I have said about the universal acceptance of your cultural artifacts appears to ride roughshod over nationalism, I am convinced that nationalism is in good health and unlikely to vanish in the near future. Far from it, today there are more independent nations, most of them enthusiastically nationalistic, than ever before in history, and we can confidently predict that there will be even more before the end of the century.

**Zachary Karabell:** If you start talking about cultural arguments, about "soft power," you're also going to have to look at this as a two-way street. When Americans order Chinese food, whether in New York or Nebraska, that doesn't necessarily make them emulate the Chinese. Many listen to African music, yet that doesn't imply that they will become more sympathetic toward Africa. I'm sure most Californians eat tacos on occasion, but this does not lead them to pro-Mexican attitudes. So we also have to consider what the effects of other cultures on Americans really are – whether contact with the "artifacts" of other cultures actually signifies the ascendance of those cultures in the U.S. It apparently does not, and that raises doubts about the dominant influence blue jeans and rap music, for example, have on the culture of the rest of the world.

Secondly, in forecasting a global homogenization of the fox, it is one thing to be descriptive of what is going on; it is another thing to be predicting what is going to happen. One of the dangers of describing a phenomenon is to assume that because it is, it will be. I think to a great degree this is not a story that is a *fait accompli*. In fact, if one looked at India at the turn of the century, you would have seen many wearing British clothes, much more adoption of British manners; you might have assumed that Indian culture had died. While in fact, it didn't die. It became something *sui generis* in time. But it didn't become English. Similarly, it is possible that Latin America may not become Westernized; it may become its own culture which will go inward and not just outward.

**Claudio Véliz:** All right, but surely the best comment on your point about India is that English is now the *lingua franca* of the whole Indian sub-continent. The popularity of Indian restaurants in the English-speaking world cannot possibly be considered the equivalent of the general acceptance in India of soccer, cricket, the English language, and countless other cultural artifacts of English provenance. During the past three centuries, the people who use the English language have shown themselves remarkably responsive to exotica. There is indeed an imbalance between

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an introspective Castile, and her Spanish-speaking world, always disdainful towards exotica, and the English-speaking world, which at least since the eighteenth century has shown itself amiable towards exotica. Here we have another dimension of the problem. The English-speaking peoples are consumers of French wines, Italian opera, German motorcars, Japanese cameras, Chilean fruit, Chinese table napkins, and all kinds of products of the most diverse origin imaginable, but the rest of the world is overwhelmingly, almost uniquely, a consumer of the popular and economic culture of the English-speaking world.

It could be added that in Latin America, at least the working class is also becoming a consumer of the religious culture of the north. This kind of imbalance is not novel. In the time of Alexander, the Egyptians had a manner of going about burying their dead with which we are all very familiar. Any child can tell an Egyptian mummy from anything else even remotely similar. But under the Hellenistic Ptolemaics, these mummies acquired Greek faces, which they kept for the next three centuries, confirming the pervasive Hellenization of the Mediterranean world. No doubt the Hellenes were familiar with some cultural traits of Egyptian origin, but what gives the age its name was the reverse process, also responsible for placing Greek faces on Egyptian mummies.

**Peter Berger:** But this is a very interesting question. You understimate ideologies. What is the difference between an American eating tacos and a Mexican eating hamburgers? The American can eat as many as he wants but is not going to necessarily absorb the culture of *machismo*. In contrast, for example, the more hamburgers the Mexican eats, the more he is going to absorb more American feminism. In other words, I am suggesting, not in a magical way, but in a sociological way, that you emphasize the absorption of an array of superficial cultural products without distinguishing them from those Hellenistic cultural products which have a deep sacramental character and which represent a quite different kind of assimilation. They are visible signs of an invisible grace. They carry with them ideological baggage of which they are symbols. In constrast, the consumption of exotica in the U.S. or in Europe does not carry this freight.

**Ricardo Arias Calderón:** Two things you brought up worry me a great deal. We are living for the first time in over a century in a one-power world, under one model of economic artifact and one model of political artifact; and I think we're paying a significant price for it. There is an undervaluing of the cost of that model, of how it reveals its limita-

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tions. That doesn't mean one refuses the model, but there is endless change, a final boredom, a search for transcendence. This remains at the horizontal, immanent level, and that is part of the cost of living in a one-power world, because however bad and evil the other power was, it reminded one of otherness. One had it in front of oneself, and one could aim at transcultural otherness even if one didn't want to finally embrace it. I find an incredible undervaluing of the cost of industrialization.

My second point is, you have been less than candid in insisting that you do not attempt to predict the future, when you state: "the possibility of its [the Industrial Revolution's] metropolitan center emigrating elsewhere in the foreseeable future is virtually insignificant." In a sense, you wish to stand at the end of history. In fact, history is going to go on, and diversity will necessarily reemerge as human experience. Is there a great deal of changefulness in this long list of things, objects, which have traveled from one culture to another? After a while, it is inevitable that the human being seeks another transcendence, spiritual transcendence – about which there is no reference in your book.

You also undervalue the evangelical experience. I am a Catholic, but you seem to see the conversions to evangelical Protestantism in Latin American as an appendage of the economic artifacts; as a cargo cult. I think it is something else. I think the society is becoming more associative than communitarian at a faster rate than you perhaps perceive. It is becoming more morally confused; it offers a greater margin for having to make discretionary choices which are difficult. It is less emotional in its religiosity. I see the conversions as "wanting to save the tradition in a heretical way." It is a spiritual experience which I don't share, but it is telling us about a void that people feel, particularly at the levels of society that have less access to the new consumer society. They can see it and feel the impact of it and they can't share in it, so they look for an escape from it, rather than an associative entrance into it. I think we have to widen the dimension of our discussion to address some of these phenomena.

**Claudio Véliz:** Let me agree with you that the cost of industrial modernity is high, and that if one is prosperous within a traditional community, one is altogether better off. The problem, as I see it, is that modernity is very much like the proverbial "slight case of pregnancy." Once on its way, virtually impossible to stop. Why? Among many other reasons, because those who are most keenly aware of the high cost extracted by industrial modernity, are not those who most readily respond to its lures. Academics, intellectuals, and their friends and relations are obviously in a better position to know about the consequences of the

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coming of industrialization and modernity than those who only see the attractive consumer goods, improved services, medical care, leisure, entertainments, and the other myriad glittering prizes. As to the cost of industrialization, be it the destruction of the natural environment or of the traditional community, the object of my book is not to protest against it, but simply to notice what is happening, which at present, it seems to me, is that very large numbers of our fellow humans beings are voting with their feet and with their money to support movement in this particular direction.

I certainly agree with your point about one of the possible ideological explanations of the rise of evangelical Protestantism. There is also a social and political aspect of those phenomena that should be noted. There can be little doubt that those most interested in the conversion of males are their wives and daughters. They have discovered that conversion makes men behave more responsibly, and keeps them away from alcoholism, gambling, and beating their wives, as well as from political activism, womanizing, and swearing. Converts tend to become hard-working and reliable employees and the result is prosperity. This is a weighty fact that supports your assertion that these mass conversions amount to much more than a cargo-cult acceptance of an alien creed.

**Robert Packenham:** I have two observations, the first of which I would like to address to Dr. Arias Calderón. I don't quite understand how you get from arguing that there is one dominant power to the idea that there is only one dominant model imposed on the rest of the world. America is not totally dominant globally, economically. It is true that the model of economic liberalization is rooted here in the U.S., but it is not imposed elsewhere. Véliz's notion of people reaching towards it is accurate. It seems to me that this goes with your own points about diversity; there are alternatives. If countries are not buying into them, it is because they don't want them. I don't see how one gets from the idea of a dominant military power to the idea that this dominant power is imposing itself on others.

**Ricardo Arias Calderón:** I am simply saying that there is a cost to not having alternatives.

**Frank Heuberger:** It seems a bit naive to me to portray the U.S. simply as an economic and political offering out there in a global market of societal systems, free for the asking to customers from all socio-economic environs to choose from it whatever part they think is of value to them. I happen to agree with Dr. Arias on that point. With the collapse of the

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so-called real-existing socialist regimes in the East and the global victory of the capitalist model, there has appeared at the same time a bad aftertaste attached to this triumph. All over Eastern Europe we find a continuing resistance against a cheerful adoption of the Western capitalist system. And this is not so much directed against the economic paradigm of free trade and market competition but against a systemic rationale intrinsic to capitalism that threatens to kill also those socialist achievements that many Eastern Europeans find still worthy of preservation. Even if we disagree on that account, and even if it is true that this process can be described as a case of induced "pregnancy" that is hard to stop, this transformation may also be one of transition, a transition that ultimately may change the face of contemporary capitalism as a whole. So for me, neither the costs of the transition are clear, nor has the process come to an end. It is true that there is no socialist model out there any more, but the practice of capitalist globalization may be much more complex and unpredictable that we thought or think.

**Claudio Véliz:** May I respond to Dr. Arias Calderón's comment on my very tentative attempt to indulge in prophecy? There is a plausible reason for my assertion that it is unlikely that the metropolis of industrialism will move away from the English-speaking world. I was born into a world in which the *lingua franca* was French. If one wanted to move across boundaries one had to master the French language. Today there is no doubt that the *lingua franca* of the world is English. The interesting thing is to try to imagine which is going to be the next one. There was a time, not so long ago, when some thought it was going to be Russian, or Chinese, but today our inability even to imagine which language is going to take the place of English as the next *lingua franca* suggests that we are going to remain where we are for a considerable time.

**Zachary Karabell:** Yes, French prevailed as the *lingua franca* for one hundred and fifty years, but it did not lead to the revivification of the French empire.

**Claudio Véliz:** That is precisely the point I try to make in the chapter on the "Hellenistic Aftermath." England, which after all is the source of the *lingua franca,* has ceased to be a world power, but the culture of the English is being embraced everywhere, and without duress. It is exactly the Hellenistic case; Athens never recovered from the disaster of Syracuse, and following the dissolution of the Delian Confederacy, ceased forever to play a minor role in world affairs, but that was also when the known

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world became effortlessly and lastingly Greek.

**Ricardo Arias Calderón:** Would Plotinus have thought that anything else except Greek would ever be spoken?

**Claudio Véliz:** Yes, I agree that cultural phenomena are endlessly surprising. After Cannae, no one would have imagined that the next *lingua franca* after Greek would be Latin, and this was in 216 B.C. Of course it is virtually impossible to predict these things, but the very least that we can ask is for a challenger to emerge over the horizon, and this is very clearly not happening today.

**Irving Louis Horowitz:** The issue of language and its relation to culture is not quite so open and shut. Through the networking of computer technology, we already are creating an international language. While it has many elements of English, it is but part of a common supra-language. This new condition is not one of artificial constructs, like Esperanto, but a response to realistic demands for better and rapid communciation over great distances.

Let me conclude these remarks with a particularist counter-illustration to the universalist points that have been raised by others. And if it is not quite central to Claudio's concerns, it does nonetheless illustrate how complex issues of language and culture become in ordinary lives. I am often in Holland, and I once asked my Dutch friends "Why do you continue to speak Dutch?" They said, "Irving, this is the language of our heart; when we make love, we speak Dutch; when we have a scientific conference with foreigners we speak English." This makes clear that language is a subtle thing; although English is the common scientific language, it has not destroyed the language of the private self and the life of the soul. It is true that the corporate language as well as the scientific idiom is English, but it has not destroyed the intimacies with which we communicate - the language of love, region, and nation.

**Robert Packenham:** I didn't know we were going to close on the subject of love, but thank you for your clarification. I want to emphasize that just because the democratic style has been widely adopted, it is not the only style available. That kind of reasoning really does belong to the hedgehog.

There is an essay by the Brazilian political scientist Bolivar Lamounier, "The Importance of Certain Formalisms," published about

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fifteen years ago. He talks about free speech and elections and a free press mattering, and I think that political discourse really has moved that way a lot in Latin America. The fact that Fujimori's personality has imperfections is not central. Yes, these systems are imperfect, but they are significantly different from what it was like under the military, or under regimes such as the authoritarian one of Mexico.

**Claudio Véliz:** Four aspects of this problem merit consideration: the political, the economic, the one we have associated with consumerism, and the religious. In politics, there is no doubt that things are moving in the direction that you suggest. In economics, it is equally clear that the whole region is embracing free market economics, no doubt with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and with Chile, so far, showing the best results, probably because of its insularity. As for the general acceptance of consumer goods originating in the English-speaking world, I take it that today's discussion indicates that the phenomenon deserves all the attention we have bestowed on it. Finally, there is the very important religious aspect, convincingly reflected in the unprecedented number of conversions to evangelical Protestantism. This is more than four straws on the breeze; these are four weighty beams borne by a powerful wind of change that is blowing in a very definite direction. I find it impossible to ignore such evidence.

**Irving Louis Horowitz:** Peter Berger has the last point. That is, we conduct business in English, but we manage to kill in Serbian.

**Edith Kurzweil:** On that note, thank you all very much.

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**GEORGE KONRAD**

# Something Is Over

If everything around us is changing, we must be changing too.

Literature as we knew it under socialism – that is, literature as a national institution – has ceased to exist. Gone are our cheap books: the state has no particular interest in whether its citizens read what its writers have to say. We writers are no longer high priests, but we are no longer heretics either. Nor was political dissent ever really the domain of literature proper: when criticism can be heard in parliament or read in the dailies, it does not need to play hide and seek between covers.

Besides, political statements as such have lost their ability to shock; indifference is a great leveler. And when it comes to the most heated controversies of the day, writers are suddenly rank amateurs. Writing is a less serious profession than it was; it is more of a hobby, a pastime, a sport. Priests have reclaimed their prerogative to speak on exalted topics, and politicians are fed grandiloquent formulas by speechwriters. Writers have no more reason to wax lofty. In a liberal democracy our fellow citizens do not need our spiritual guidance. What they need are good books.

Under state socialism the writer assumed a positive or negative function; in bourgeois society the writer is a private individual capable of providing certain information. And – insofar as we are actually living in a liberal democracy – what writers write is their affair and their affair alone. If there is little interest in what they have to say, they can publish it themselves in one or two thousand copies. A year or two after the big change, writers are still fretting over whether they serve a purpose, fill a need. They have begun to suspect they are passé. The money is gone; the power is gone. The market has not yet found a way to make them profitable; the state no longer wants them.

The socialist state needed them if they didn't kick up too much of a fuss. The state maintained its own culture, which consisted of books passed by its censor, but that culture was supplemented by an uncensored one. Even today the state has money to subsidize a culture more or less faithful to itself, but culture it does not perceive as faithful it leaves to its

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own devices, that is, to the private economy. Gone are the days when writers could count on living off one book a year for the rest of their lives. Many writers are unemployed. This is a time of trial. Writers must find a way to combine literature with other forms of activity and accept the idea that they need not stick to one profession all their lives.

Books have become more expensive, readers less solvent. Trash is the rage. People not only have less money for books; they have less time for books. Literature occupies less and less space in our lives. Only now, in retrospect, can we see it clearly: an age in the history of literature has come to an end.

Literature has sunk to the lowest rung on the institutional ladder. The national associations or unions of writers – long bastions of the institutionalization of literature – are on the verge of splintering into interest groups. The republic of literature as a body of normative spiritual values is a thing of the past.

Publishing is going through the same crisis as the other branches of the economy. Literature shares in the new poverty. Still, I feel that the period of rising book prices and falling incomes is a transitional one and that literature will come out of it alive. We can be confident of the emergence – a few years hence – of a stronger middle class that will not have lost its taste for literature. Eventually cheaper technology and rising incomes will take care of the problem.

Until then, however, seven lean years. Only the determination of a monk will keep the continuity of a life's work going, and only the most hardened writers among us – and the hardened amateurs – will be able to write their way through it. Many will simply return to their roles as professionals, earning their keep by means of one intellectual endeavor or another and writing on the side. Those who stick it out will have to look to private benefactors for support – agencies of civic redistribution like charities and foundations.

Two other institutions will help to keep literature alive. One is the press. Some newspapers have disappeared, but others spring up to take their place, and the print and broadcast media both consume enormous amounts of text. Moreover, by the time readers have plowed their way through the headlines, they may well be thirsting for the relief provided by a writer's more permanent "news" There is a need for something more than the politician's exposition of or the self-proclaimed independent's commentary on a party platform; there is a need for thoughtful, personal views, for points of orientation in today's terrain of shaken values. There are issues that need to be addressed by names, reputations, well-formulated texts. The power of the word is still very much alive, and there is a market for advice. The more mobile and unsettled the

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population is, the more it needs serious, well-considered opinions.

The second institution that will help is international publishing. Western Europe is experiencing a wave of interest in the rest of Europe and the rest of the world. National egotism is far from dead, but it cannot stop people from thinking and is not yet considered a quality worthy of celebration. To the east of the former Iron Curtain, however, the outburst of national sentiment that played so crucial a role in the breakup of what used to be called the Soviet bloc or socialist world has considerably decreased the relations – and with them the once ritualistically official cultural exchanges – among members of what used to be called Comecon. As a result, there has been little incentive to establish a true exchange of ideas on the East-Central European front. Here publishing has made a negative contribution: its malady – or, as the bleaker seers would have it, its collapse – prevents our own books from becoming bestsellers in our own part of the world.

Writers in our part of the world and century have overrated their importance, becoming propagandists, priests, proclaiming this or that principle, railing against the demon of the day, playing the spiritual leader. The time has come to change all that. State socialism was so dependent on ideology that it could not survive without the cooperation of a loyal intelligentsia, but now the chapter of extra-literary commitment is closed. Writers are no longer required to foist distracting prejudices on their readers, to overstep their craft and cross literature with something that has little to do with it. There is always a quasi-moral inducement to crossing literature with something else, and some writers feel they can't do without it. They picture themselves arriving in the nick of time, only moments before the ultimate catastrophe, and saving . . . what do they plan to save?

My twentieth century began in the year Hitler took power: I was born in 1933.

The twentieth century has been characterized by the view on the part of numerous radicals that it is both possible and desirable to take power by the most expedient means – by force, if necessary – and hold onto it for dear life. Men and words traveled back and forth between nationalist and socialist revolutions, and the path of many an intellectual led from one extreme to the other. The relationship between politics and literature has been an uneasy one in all this, never quite fusing, yet never entirely separate. Moreover, the twentieth century has brought politics into the home, the bedroom, the telephone, the brain. Both fascism and communism defended their states by reaching into our cup-

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boards for manuscripts. It is in our interest to question any principle that authorizes the state to bully.

Dictatorships do not let their citizens forget about politics, relentlessly etching its tedious stimuli into our memories. Consequently, no one could be genuinely naive; everyone had to be vigilant. And because the state had its bias, the opposition had *its* bias. Even people who tried to opt out – to find a small, safe corner for themselves and keep from being picked on – had a bias. Pro or con, impulse and anguish skew narration.

I see inquisitive lights in people's eyes: they want to know how things stand; they want explanations. The man in the street is less gullible than he was three years ago; he's got a lot more savvy, the savvy that comes of bitter experience. There is no political afterlife; the here and now is everything. You are what you are, not what you could be if the system were different.

The system is social-nationalist capitalism and it's here to stay. You can call it names or turn it to your advantage. Doubting Thomases are looking for values; they are not killing one another: the new politics has produced not a single casualty. There will be more poverty at first – then less. There will be more armed robbery – then, in all likelihood, less. Bankers and intellectuals have started feeling a mutual attraction. Life is no longer an enigma: what you see is more or less what you get. And what you see is a fast change act accompanied by a new rhetoric.

But the developments have also given rise to a new amnesia: many people feel they have had their pasts snatched away from them. So much of what they learned turns out to have been hogwash. They are not looking forward to the future, though they are willing to put up with it; they may even grow to love it – just because it's there.

I expect good books to come of the outlook that will emerge once wounded senses of identity have had time to heal and today's people have had time to gain insight into the people of yesterday and the day before (bearing in mind our region's propensity for tragically complex human destinies and self-justifying skullduggery). If good literature does come of all this, it will surely show the making of history to be absurd, though the result of perfectly sensible, well-intentioned, and far from absurd aspirations. Now that the time has come for narratives and dialogic epics, we must ask which prevails in literature: the logic of the dialogue or the logic of tribal prejudice? Shall we be able to turn our past (which public opinion still sees in fashionably ideological terms) into an

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epic? What are the major lessons of the twentieth century? The fact that we have survived it does not lend any sense to the adventure. Can one have a life that makes sense in a history that makes none?

The eighties have come to an end, and as we enter the mysterious nineties we must bear in mind their great riddle: are we in a position to celebrate the second millennium, grateful for being, for being able to be, for holding our ground in this vale of torment and fallibility where we bore or beguile our God according to our moods and lights?

The twentieth century is coming to an end. It has been a century of aggression and irresponsibility. Its follies, its cataclysmic follies stream out of books and mass graves. No writer, no politician, no public figure is innocent. No one may level accusations, but no one is released from remorse. Remorse, the consciousness of guilt, goes hand in hand with responsibility. Shouldering responsibility for the future implies shouldering responsibility for the past. Weak men take weak men's places.

What did the lack of responsibility consist of? The bloating of thin-skinned collective egos. What did it lead to? Wars and dictatorships. One or another of the collective egos would take to expanding aggressively and with self-righteous fervor, wounding its neighbors' sensibilities, claiming the right to rule, sullying air and water, and bombing perfidiously, while explaining away gas chambers and labor camps with winsome arguments and proclaiming its own supremacy on the basis of various world-historical or world-geographical missions.

All my arguments can be torn to pieces, I know, but I have a very personal disease: I am an optimist. Why? I see a number of determined individuals working hard to make this country work, make way not for tricksters and con men but for movers and shakers (this is their time and of course a time for the foundations that support them); I see fewer cowed subjects waiting for the king to provide. The government has made considerable progress if it has learned to ban less. And it has. All things considered, I feel we have less reason to fear than we had last year at this time.

The dour anxiety so characteristic of the citizen of the socialist state is still an integral element of the post-communist citizen, but its causes have changed. People feel obliged to take an alarmist view of things. Everything can be talked about openly now, of course, and because the more inflated the view the more attention it attracts, there are those who have turned scare tactics to their advantage. Yet even people who paint the most apocalyptic pictures on their walls in the dead of night go to work the next morning. And since more and more people aspire

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to run their own lives and since bad work is beginning to acquire a bad name, the work they do is actually quite decent.

The author of these lines, fearing neither despotism nor civil war, is guilty of heinous sobriety and patent complicity with the majority. His watchword being trot rather than gallop or ditch, he sees no grounds for hysteria, no reason to jump ship.

People are expected to serve noble causes. Of causes there is no end, and we tend to regard our own as noble and other peoples' as ignoble. Which leads your humble servant to muse, "What cause do I serve?" The customary answers – culture or society, church or state, humanity or nation, business firm or political party, the integrity of science or the autonomy of art – are all well and good, but since one can serve any number of masters (loyalty being an infinitely expandable concept) the simplest thing for me to say is, "I serve no one." Not even myself. Am I serving my wife when I carry her suitcase? Am I serving my son when I play bear with him? Am I serving my guests when I wine and dine them? Am I serving my publisher when I hand in a manuscript? No. These activities are an integral part of living together: we do what can reasonably be expected of us, and we take pleasure in it; others pay us back in kind. Whom do I serve when I lift my pen and set it down on a sheet of paper? Who is served by an idea or a question? A sentence – this sentence – is because it wishes to be.

If I refuse to serve – if at most I cooperate – what am I good for? Merely to be? To partake in the sometimes heavenly, sometimes hellish blessings of existence? To acknowledge my birth by keeping myself alive? To make ready for the time when I am good for nothing? People don't come with instruction manuals. If people aren't created to serve a cause, if they don't do what they do for the sake of posterity or an afterlife, if they have no preordained obligations, then they are fully responsible for their own acts! They themselves must determine – improvise, one might say – their obligations; they themselves must set their agendas; they themselves must provide a more or less personal rationale for each decision they make. And that rationale is as central to their existence as the loves of their life or the tools of their trade. Moreover, internal obligations grow as external obligations shrink, the critical mind (the intellectual's chief tool) corroding the external plan and allowing the contours of the internal plan to emerge.

Why not start at zero? Everything that is is more than nothing. Even

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an obituary can give life: it enriches our emotional terrain, makes us grateful for one more day, helps us to see life as something given to us, not something coming to us. For we are worthless creatures and have nothing whatever coming to us. The fact that we emerge from nothing and return to nothing, the fact that we are alive is in itself a gift, a reciprocal gift, a gift of mutual gain, because in life as in love, giving is receiving. We cannot make a clearcut distinction between ourselves and those near to us. We establish a symbiotic relationship with our environment in such as way as to merit at least a mental stroll through the realm of the end-in-itself, and as we stroll, we indulge in the idea of having a self-contained purpose. If dust we are and unto dust we shall return, if such is our only trajectory, if we are made in God's image and thus meant to be as perfect as our Heavenly Father, then let us be unique and like unto Him who made us. Life is but a form that becomes visible with the passing of time and the presence of someone desiring to behold it. The challenge is to create a work of the limited time we are given.

Our job is to live, and to live is to live together. We live together in the classroom and the dining room, in the hospital and the air-raid shelter, in the swimming pool and in bed. We miss one another and make sacrifices for one another, though when we grow up and move apart we lose sight of one another. Nor do we need to be together all the time: solitude has its merits. Where do old alliances go? Into the sack of things past, the ego's timeless chronotope. We are for ourselves and one another as animals and the heavenly bodies.

Life from this standpoint is an arbitrary gift and should therefore be appreciated as it stands. If we proceed from the assumption that the end can come at any moment, history begins anew for every individual every day, though most people grow more defined, confined, and calcified in what is unremitting agony. The more rigid, the more unbending one is, the more mortal one is. Taking a shape, accepting a mold, moving in a single direction – they all mean coming to nought. Yet we do have a certain freedom to choose how we cover the short stretch allotted to us: there are a wide variety of paths available.

As attentive as we are to our own comforts and impulses, as accustomed as we are to looking after ourselves and even others, we know that at any moment we can have a stroke or a car accident, we can be done in by business failure or heart failure, by a family tragedy or a pistol shot. It follows that the novels we write with our lives may end today or any day. Just being able to open my eyes is a gift.

Honoring the here and now goes against the transcendental. I am

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not attracted by religious or scientific futurism; I do not believe the future is more radiant than the present. The idea of a more tolerant approach to life is spreading quietly: integration and compassion are taking the place of isolation and expulsion. I also sense a new sincerity, something beyond science and religion, beyond politics and public relations. The core of that sincerity lies in an awareness of death. The place where we are most likely to confront our mortality is art. The artist knows that a story has more than a beginning; the artist knows a story has an end.

If this view of life focuses on the here and now, it is simply because the here and now is where the challenge lies. Yesterday cannot remedy today; tomorrow's noble goal is no excuse for today's crime. What you do now is what counts. If you are traveling on a train or bathing your child, that is your creative work for the moment.

Everyone wants to be an artist: everyone writes, draws, plays an instrument, indulges in some kind of intellectual or spiritual luxury; everyone gives both imagination and memory a work-out; everyone has hidden concerns. Every graybeard retains a cranny of childlike innocence, and we all soar out of ourselves occasionally and enjoy transforming the reality around us. This cerebral rambling, this internal cinema takes up a good deal of our time; it runs from the cradle to the grave, oblivious even to hardening of the arteries. In fact, we devote relatively more time to it than to the conscious and conscientious life-long work we do in connection with the outer world. It is the opposite of goal-oriented activity, incorporating elements of art and play, and if we add our night- and daydreams to it, it turns out to occupy the greater part of our lives.

Although writers and professors and actors and historians have become leading figures in the new democracies, I don't think intellectuals wish to make a policy of excluding politicians and businessmen, revolutionaries and secret service men, civil servants and clergymen. The intelligentsia could learn these people's professions, but they would only be disguises for its own: the profession of understanding. That is why I don't think the intelligentsia is interested in direct political or economic power. It will keep to its natural medium and the power of the word, the image, the symbol.

If intellectuals have power, they must have a calling as well. The intelligentsia is the keeper of legitimacies: it provides grounds for morality, argumentation for the law, exegesis for religion, allegories for ethics, and analysis for politics. In other words, intellectuals peddle clear consciences and guilty consciences. All people have cultural values to guide them and

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justify their existence, to help them believe they are in the right and what they do is good. Those values are in the hands of the intellectuals.

Most intellectuals want to multiply and fill the streets, spread their wares in the marketplace. They want to invade other people's books if only in a footnote; they want to be referred to, referred to more than their rivals. They know the value of sacrifice, having become slaves to competititve examinations and quantitative hierarchies early in life. They work long, hard hours, subordinating the emotional to the professional. If all goes well, they produce copious articles, attract disciples, found schools of thought. They sacrifice their lives for a name, the pettiest form of survival.

But our times call for knowledge that goes beyond these intellectuals' technical expertise; our times call for the knowledge of the initiate. Initiates care about nothing but the issue at hand. There is no discovery without passion, and these madmen are committed to what they do for its own sake, not for the fame it may bring. Careers are irrelevant to understanding. (A career does no harm, but it must not become a goal in itself.)

Intellectuals of the initiate type – *true* intellectuals we might call them – are few in number. Perhaps they needn't be numerous. Teams of several dozen in major cities have sufficed to create all the short-lived intellectual golden ages the world has known.

Moreover, there is such a thing as an international intellectual elite, though its composition and contributions are not always apparent until after the fact. And because words influence people, there is such a thing as intellectual power – priest, prophet, and poet power – the power of individuals considered wise and therefore vested with authority. The burden of confidence weighs heavy on such individuals – on doctors, for instance. Their perspicacity is their debt to the world, their duty; understanding is their profession. Sometimes it takes a naive soul to notice things others miss, and these people tend to be visionaries, too busy to worry about the prevailing course of events or their own skins. One way intellectuals communicate with one another is by referring to the great names of the mythologies of their trade, the not-quite-of-this-world freaks of the spirit.

Where does the university come in? Well, teachers breed teachers, and if things go well, that means mature adults who can stand up to the jokes of fate, who do not renounce under pressure what they hold dear.

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Every adult is an idealist in a way; adults know they have obligations, obligations they set for themselves. The opposite of the adult is the plastic person, the kind of person who assumes whatever shape happens to be advantageous. Plastic people are ready to change at a moment's notice: with a minimum of coaching, for instance, they can master a whole new vocabulary. They are like spare parts, easily interchangeable. That is what makes them so valuable. From burnt-out informer to shiny paragon in no time flat.

This is a dangerous time: words are falling into disrepute; everything is jumbled together – character hash, memory mush – and no one can take consolation any more in the idea that things will change. What is is.

Most people are surprised that nothing seems to be going the way they thought it would: everything is chaotic, everything is a mess, there's too much excitement, too much on at once! Now someone has come along and predicted the chaos is over, we're in for harmony, history has come to an end. But then there's the problematic human race, a half-wild, half-domesticated race capable of anything. Though fully cognizant of the natural history of decline and decay, though fully aware of man's endless reserves of evil, I would still maintain that the people I most admire are idealists who are willing to make sacrifices for the goals they consider the most worthy and who feel that they have a specific, personal mission in life, one they do not know in advance but decipher as they go along.

Universities transmit values. It is not enough for them to turn out apathetic specialists. The harm apathetic specialists can do far surpasses their potential for good. Think of the engineers and businessmen – upstanding citizens all – who place the most lethal weaponry in the hands of any tyrant with the money to pay for them. Indifference, conformism, a lack of professional ideals, an impersonal readiness to do anybody's bidding as long as the technical means are available – people have to be taught these things for major crimes against humanity to take place.

If by some strange quirk of fate I were to find myself on a university podium, I would spend less time initiating my students into the tricks of the trade than inculcating in them a feeling of personal responsibility. You have been entrusted with a life, I would tell them, and that makes you responsible for yourself and, in your person, for the whole of humanity. Responsibility has a way of popping up in front of you; all you have to do is recognize it. It is not enough to be a scholar; it is not enough to be an intellectual; it is not enough to comply with a set of

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norms: the world does not owe you a living.

Nor is it enough to train professional specialists to satisfy the short-term demands of the market or the state: the university should serve as an antidote to the world.

We are swept along by the norms we learn, by ever more rigid professional roles; we find it increasingly difficult to assert the personal element. Universities are producing career-oriented professional intellectuals designed to fit reigning political clichés like off-the-peg jackets. Wholesale identification with a professional role is crippling. Are you doing your job or is your job doing you? You are graded and typed while in school. A role can be an agenda too. A plan, a prescription, a set of precepts, a strategy.

Art consititues the day-to-day existence of the idealist: idealists do only what they respect; otherwise they refuse. "I refuse" is a morality in itself: we are not forced to participate in anything we judge to be wrong. The time has come for personal responsibility to take the place of collective responsibility. The twenty-first century will be the century of carefully considered, consciously espoused and validated personal responsibility.

The twentieth century was the century of collective crime and collective irresponsibility (or the call for collective responsibility), and all its lunacy began in books. Yes, intellectuals are responsible for what their contemporaries do. People are more than active beings, they are moral beings: they want the propriety of their acts confirmed; they do what they think right, what they are brought up to do, what enhances their spiritual profile. They do what they are told.

The social history of the intelligentsia consists entirely of a continuous jockeying for increased autonomy, because true power for the intellectual is the equivalent of freedom. If intellectual endeavor is to thrive, it must sever all ties with authority external to it. Pluralism provides the leeway necessary for maneuvering, and intellectuals are by definition the athletes of understanding. Theirs is a creative understanding, one that accepts the contradictions of the other and values his or her aesthetic complexity. No one can understand a person from above; viewing a person from a position of superiority leads to platitudes, to reductionist simplifications that make the person boring and have nothing to do with understanding.

We have turned into a world society: far-off catastrophes and wars

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or mere changes in fashion make it abundantly and immediately clear that we are dependent on humanity as a whole and humanity as a whole depends on us. Our lives can be affected by a clever lunatic whose artistic forte happens to be mass destruction, the destruction of foreigners and his own kind, mixed. We are dependent on the new collective identities that up and decide their essence to be incompatible with that of their neighbors and think nothing of killing to gain sway over them. In Eastern Europe these collective identities are particularly likely to explode. In their hysteria they feel they are surrounded by enemies and therefore in dire need of cleansing their ethnic-national-religious-linguistic-tribal ranks (a process that includes rewarding the politically loyal). While communist dictatorships wither on the vine, their internationalist ideology no longer viable, the prospects for national dictatorships are blossoming.

Now that the big nations' bloc system – that is, a world order resting on the nuclear powder keg – is no more, the little nations (and nationalities) want their own way (and, to some extent, the right to tell others what to do). They are restless; they take potshots at their neighbors and demand territorial autonomy. A minority turns majority, which then breaks up into more minorities, each insisting on its own voice. The continent is teeming with autonomies; dissolution fever has reached endemic proportions. Only yesterday all talk was of unification, and people believed it was good. Now all talk is of breaking asunder, and people believe it is good. Both doctrines – the doctrine of unity and the doctrine of autonomy – are the work of people who write books. If things go on like this, anyone who fails to rage against his neighbor is liable to be accused of treason.

East Europeans did not drink in capitalism with their mother's milk; they must learn it as adults. It is only natural that they should be unsure of themselves and thus suffer from wounded pride. Enter a band of mediocrities with their fists in the air. The hatred is there; it just needs someone to direct it.

Does the region recognize the latent fascism in all this? Sometimes it is not so latent. Anti-communist rhetoric is increasingly peppered with far-right clichés. Professional hate-mongers on the lookout for an international mafia are beginning to give their devil Jewish features, a revival that reeks of pre-war, unfinished business.

I see a special role for the intelligentsia, a new class that has proved its ability to live dangerously in our century. It played no mean part in the raving intolerance of our two collectivisms, providing theory in the

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background for the vulgarizers and organizers in the foreground. "Bourgeois individualism" got low marks from the state intelligentsia, "the world bourgeoisie" even lower; provincialism swaggered. Much of the inflated moral indignation, indeed, much of the ideologies themselves stemmed from a lack of familiarity with foreign languages. Insecure egos found support in peremptory rhetoric. Both collectivisms banned genuine artists and promoted pseudo-intellectuals. Much as we would like to believe that these subservient sub-intelligentsias played themselves out during their bloody kitsch heydays, we cannot be certain. How insane it would be if even now, as we rejoice over communism's death throes, they dished up a strapping anti-communist fascism.

Nationalism and socialism have lost their timeliness for Europe; Europe's quests lie elsewhere. Their messages are more nostalgic than creative: if one goes too far it will turn into fascism; if the other goes too far it will turn into communism. And because Europe not only attended their performances but – this being the twentieth century and thus a time of living theater – took active part in them, I feel we can still use the notion of antipolitics. Antipolitics: the moral criticism of politics. Morality cannot be politics, but it can be politics' demon (in Socrates' sense of the word), its incubus, its bad conscience; it can be politics' dream work. The cynicism of antipolitics can keep us from being duped. Even when the authorities seem to be taking responsibility, they will not pay for the harm they cause.

The exciting events accompanying the changes could only have been followed by a let-down. Transformation there was, not transfiguration. Despondency in one corner, that morning after feeling in the other. The same people lining up in different formations. Moreover, whole countries, whole regions are as capable of changing uniforms as individuals. Both the bird's eye and the cat's eye view of the new line-ups and uniforms make grotesque sights. It goes without saying that – in terms of friendships and animosities and whom one can trust and whom one cannot – everyone is the same. What modifications there are resemble those one makes from one marriage to the next. After imposing liberation, the new system has imposed a new type of accommodation.

The keen observer will note that a new series of buzzwords has appeared on the scene. Why not, after all? Don't we want to learn languages quickly and easily and expose quasi-pluralistic self-censorship? Of course a pluralist intelligentsia can also share in illusions and forced silence. During the seventies and eighties, for instance, the author of these

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lines was struck by the reluctance among his West German conversation partners to picture a Europe that was no longer defined by the iron curtain and hence redefined Germany's place in the balance of power. The experts labeled all such talk a pipe dream: the serious public was engrossed in debating the desirable number of missiles to be maintained on German soil. But when the Hungarians opened the borders to the East Germans, the Wall came tumbling down – and with it an entire way of thinking. Suddenly our mutual dependence and responsibility were as clear as allegory.

Euphoria over the change in system stemmed from a genuine sense of liberation when the air came whooshing out of the imaginary collective ego as out of an old balloon. The keen observer will note, however, that there are new balloons on the market.

Looking backwards, we must keep in mind that communist censorship did more than prohibit; it affirmed, affirmed all manner of things. Moreover, it did so in exalted tones and as often as not in the first-person plural. Even its first-person singular was essentially a first-person plural.

What the unsuspecting man in the street fails to see is that once more a common ego has started talking in the first-person plural. It may don the toga of independence, but it talks in terms of "us all." A clear statement of independence is not enough, nor even the sincere desire to put it into practice: good intentions are not sufficient to ensure the creation of, say, good poetry.

State functionaries during the communist period had no idea how much their every move was conditioned by the state, how much the one-party-state first-person-plural mentality had permeated their consciousness. Shifting to a nation-state first-person-plural mentality does not take a great mental effort. Shifting from the first-person plural of the Soviet Empire, whose sole concern was to maintain its crumbling colonies, to, say, the first-person plural of North Ossetia is perfectly simple and would be all well and good – were it not for Ingush neighbors.

The entire East European region is pregnant with new autonomies ready to burst out into the world and show how unique they are, each naturally enough vying to be first among equals as well as among minorities. Until recently their aspirations were foiled by the Soviet Empire; now they are foiled by a neighboring nation or nationality. The majority foils the minority, the minority the majority. Roles may change, but the other is always the troublemaker. *L'enfer – c'est les autres* – hell is

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other people – in the ethno-national context too.

Lost souls are seeking both new support and loyalties and new targets for their rancor, which has only grown with the hardships imposed by the postcommunist economy. Relations with the East have disintegrated more quickly than relations with the West can be established. If the eastern half of the continent is not to feel lost and succumb to hysteria, it must be offered the prospect of step-by-step integration into Europe in the foreseeable future despite the relatively minor (yet all but inevitable) disadvantages involved. For the breakup to have meaning, there must be a reconstruction plan giving the countries that have seceded a space where they can be reintegrated.

The German model of national socialism cast an ominous shadow over my youth, the Russian model of a socialist world order over my mature years. What now? After these German and Russian models of socialism I can envisage many people wanting domestic, home-grown varieties, pure and free of foreign influence, small-scale national socialisms, predominantly state-run but with an admixture of private, mixed economies.

The new super-value is a pure "we": loyal sons of the mother- or fatherland cannot imagine more congenial company than one another, and anyone who befouls his nest by protesting is a traitor and deserves to have his tongue cut out or be beaten to death. At least that is how most of the anonymous letter writers would have it.

Whether the authoritarian state (with its intimidation tactics, its suppression of criticism, its habit of turning opposition into enemy, its buggings and hiring-firing games, its favoritism and nepotism, its tendency to siphon state funds into the pockets of business partners, its rush to reunite politics, culture, and the economy after only half-hearted attempts at making them autonomous, its revival of the one-party state, its reinterpretation of the common good as the good of the party or party faction, its unctuous exterior and mafia-tough core, its police-immune posses, its demagoguery of hatred, its anonymous death threats in letters and phone calls) uses communist or fascist rhetoric is less interesting than whether it is in fact what we now have, whether all that has happened is that the flatterers and liars have regrouped. And most interesting of all is whether the large-scale experiment under way in the region will enable independent thinkers to take the place of their state-oriented predecessors.

The peoples of Central Europe are following the East Germans'

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progress with rapt attention. Will they become independent or second-class citizens in the new, unified Germany? How the East Germans fare in the capitalist shock therapy they are now receiving will be a telling omen for us. After all, they are now part of the much coveted fold, enjoying not only the relative confidence of the thirty-five countries of Europe – the super-continent that, broadly conceived, includes both Siberia and North America, reaching as it does from one coast of the Pacific to the other rather than merely from the Atlantic to the Urals – but also a certain intimate advantage vis-à-vis the old-boy networks of NATO and the European Community.

East German identity – if there ever was one – seems from the outside to have given way. But can those forty-five years be forgotten like the twelve that preceded them? Perhaps forgetting has become expedient again.

Germans living east of the Elbe seem from the outside to have placed themselves totally in the hands of Germans living west of the Elbe. Not only are their machines run down; they themselves are run down, their self-image impaired. Hard as it is to accept, liberation and collective self-deprecation can go hand in hand.

Hungarians, Poles, and Czechs have no rich Western uncle, but they do have a millenium of history in which communism was but a brief chapter. True, they played their part, but they overcame it as Hungarians, Poles, and Czechs and thus emerged with their self-identity in tact. The Germans' dilemma, as I see it, is whether to reject communism as an alien construct and claim it did not happen to them or to accept it as a part of German history. The East Germans played their communist roles with no less devotion than the East Europeans, and the only way of proving that West Germans would not have done the same is to prove that the people living on the even-numbered side of the streets separated by the Wall differed radically in character from the people living on the odd-numbered side.

Communism, like national socialism, is a part of German history. Jettisoning such lengthy chapters from a tradition is psychologically unsound. During the seventies and eighties my impression was that the Germans had done more to confront their World War II past than the Hungarians, a situation connected with – among other things – the Germans having played a more active role, the Hungarians a more acquiescent role in the events. Last year a number of German journalists asked me whether I feared them, meaning the new enlarged Germany. No, I said. Germany may be powerful, but each individual German is as much the little man as any other mortal.

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During the seventies and eighties I was not particularly comforted by watching the Germans put their national identity problem on ice, though I knew it would not remain there for long. Can what we in Eastern Europe call the national renaissance or nationalist upsurge circumvent Germany?

In the atmosphere of growing national self-awareness following the fall of communism will the desire to re-establish continuity bring the Germany of the thirties back into fashion? Romantic commentators notwithstanding, Hitler's Germany had no more demons than other places, though it did have less autonomy. Because the validity of the goal went unquestioned, its radical implementaion went unimpeded. The *Volk* accepted its leaders' project unthinkingly, worked hard, and followed directions loyally. Had it been more slipshod, less thorough, it would not have caused nearly so much suffering.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, Germany – a liberal *Rechtsstaat* and the world's number-one export power – stands in the transnational forefront of the Western-style democracies. Today's Germans are no longer the aggressive egoists or knights of irrationalism observers once saw in them. A large nation has been granted the opportunity to unite two civilizations, two human types in such a way as to avoid the subordination, liquidation, or even excoriation and humiliation of one by the other. Uniting the two Europes in Germany is a paradigmatic challenge. It is logical that in the process all parties should examine their former selves and alter them accordingly.

What I would tell my students, then, is: Don't identify the responsible individualism of the twenty-first century with the numbing, consumer driven mass-individualism of the twentieth. You have nothing coming to you, I would tell them, nothing but the whole world, and your calling as students is to formulate a world view based on you own first-person experience. Keep studying, I would tell them; keep rethinking things after you leave the university and for the rest of your lives. Only then you will be able to oppose tyranny. Beware of abstractions and terminologies, I would say; pay close attention to everyone fate or inspiration puts in your path. The least you can do is make Europe an electronic network of distinct entities. Why? So it continues to exist. So we don't kill one another off.

And finally, I would dissuade students in the West from playing missionary in the East. Don't go too far, I would tell them, because the natives may get restless and boil you for dinner.

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**ROBERT BRUSTEIN**

# Cultural Politics and Coercive Philanthropy

Federal money for artistic projects, always pitifully inadequate in America by comparison with other civilized countries, has been flat or diminishing since 1980, and the National Endowment for the Arts is now threatened with extinction every time it spends two hundred dollars on a controversial grant. Increasingly, it is our nonprofit, private cultural institutions, although staggering under massive deficits and teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, which are thus being pressed into compensatory service. More and more, they are being asked to validate themselves not through their creative contributions to civilization but on the basis of their community services. This condition was accurately predicted by Alexis de Tocqueville early in the nineteenth century when he expressed doubts about the possibility of serious art in the United States: "Democratic nations," he wrote in *Democracy in America,* "will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful be useful."

Current pressures on the arts to be "useful" compel funders to measure their value by outreach programs, children's projects, inner-city audience development, access for the handicapped, artists in schools, etc., in addition to demanding proofs of progress in achieving affirmative action quotas among artistic personnel, board members, and audiences. This social utilitarian view of culture has some undeniable virtues. Certainly, few people of goodwill would dispute the artistic advantages of genuine multiculturalism or interculturalism in the arts (as opposed to unicultural programs primarily designed to empower single issue groups). And there are unquestionably deep humanitarian impulses governing the new philanthropy. Given the limited resources available for both social and cultural programs, the civic-minded agencies that disburse grant money no doubt sincerely believe that a single dollar can fulfill a double purpose, just as many contemporary artists would prefer their works to function not only as a form of self-expression but also for the public good.

Looked at in the long perspective, however, the push to transform culture into an agency of social welfare is doomed to failure. To de-

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mand that creative expression be a medium for promoting minority self-esteem may seem like a thrifty way to respond to the urgent needs of the underclasses. But whatever the immediate effects of such well-meaning civic experiments, they are not long-lasting. Works of art have occasionally been known to transform consciousness and alter individual destinies. They have rarely been known to change society. Culture is not designed to do the work of politics, nor will inspirational role models even begin to compensate for the unconscionable neglect of arts education in our schools. No wonder inner city children prefer rap or salsa when so few qualified teachers have been employed by the system to expose them to serious theater, art, or music. Effective projects like the Teachers and Writers Collaborative, in which poor kids are introduced to language and poetry by practicing poets, are rare and privately subsidized. No wonder the infrequent visit of a performance artist or a dance company on a grant often leaves such students baffled and sullen, when no money exists for developing their imaginations. Anything short of daily arts education in the public school curriculum will register as little more than tokenism. Indeed, such cosmetic procedures may even be exacerbating the problem, since they tend to varnish the surface instead of probing root causes.

Whatever its impact on education, for philanthropy to administer non-profit funding by utilitarian rather than traditional aesthetic criteria is almost certainly likely to doom the arts as we know them. It is very ominous indeed that the word "quality," the standard by which art has habitually been measured, is now avoided in the majority of funding circles, being considered a code word for racism and elitism. This is true not only in federal, state, and city cultural agencies, where one expects the arts to be subject to populist and egalitarian political pressures, but even in most private funding organizations. With a few lonely exceptions (most notably the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Shubert Foundation), large and small private foundations now give their money not to general support as in the past but overwhelmingly to special programs conceived by the officers of the foundation. Active rather than receptive in relation to the choices of artists and the programming of artistic institutions, the foundation world is now engaged in what we can regard only as coercive philanthropy. Artists and institutions are obliged to follow the dictates of officious program directors or choose to be exiled to an economic *gulag*.

The Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Fund, for example, which handed out forty-five million dollars to the arts in 1993, describes its three-year program for resident theaters in the following manner: "To expand their

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marketing efforts, mount new plays, broaden the ethnic makeup of their management, experiment with color-blind casting, increase community outreach activity and sponsor a variety of other programs designed to integrate the theaters into their communities," and also to encourage "dynamic interactions between artists and communities . . . to develop new audiences . . . [and] to address the interests of children and families." These are all benevolent social goals, but they are also all peripheral to the true work of most theaters. What the foundation fails to "expand" or "broaden" or "sponsor" is an artistic goal. As a result, the great preponderance of Wallace funds each year goes to increasing "the African-American audience"; or "doubling the number of Asian Americans in the overall audience"; or "increasing the number of Latino theatregoers to forty percent of the audience"; or deepening "the involvement of . . . Latino immigrants, emerging Latino business and professional leaders"; or attracting "new theater audiences from . . . Hispanic concert-goers and African-American concert-goers"; or diversifying "through the addition of actors of color . . . with the input of its new African-American artistic associate"; or including "greater promotion within the African-American community"; or developing "new audiences from New York City's Asian-American communities," and so on (I quote a few typical citations from recent grants). Only one award last year went to an institution proposing a project with any artistic dimensions, and that one was designed to broaden the base of childrens' audiences.

Similarly, the Rockefeller Foundation, once among the most enlightened supporters of artists and artistic institutions in America, now disburses about fifteen million dollars annually, mostly to scholarship but also to arts projects indistinguishable from its Equal Opportunity and Social Science Research grant recipients. Rockefeller's Arts and Humanities Division describes its mission as encouraging scholars and artists "whose work can advance international and intercultural understanding in the United States . . . extending international and intercultural scholarship and increasing artistic experimentation across cultures." It should be noted that "international and intercultural understanding" no longer includes any understanding of Europe. To judge by the grants, the phrase refers almost exclusively to African, Asian, and, especially, Hispanic countries and cultures. (Only eight out of eighty-seven grants could be construed as escaping these categories.)

As a result, Rockefeller's three granting categories advance such noble objectives as "Extending International and Intercultural Scholarship," "Fortifying Institutions of the Civil Society," and "Increasing Artistic Experimentation Across Cultures," while the grants go almost overwhelmingly to African-American, Native-American, Asian, and Latino

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artists or institutions engaged in social objectives. (Rockefeller's largest grant in recent years, amounting to almost two million dollars, was awarded to the "Intercultural Film/Video Program" not in order to enable visual artists to experiment with new visions or advance film and video techniques but rather to "create work that explores cultural diversity"). One is not surprised to learn that Rockefeller is considering a new play initiative designed to fund works that deal with an issue the program directors call "conflict resolution." Heaven help the playwright with other issues in mind.

As for the Ford Foundation, whose enlightened Arts Division under W. McNeil Lowry was largely responsible for the massive explosion of American nonprofit dance, theater, symphony, and opera companies since the sixties (including many racially diverse institutions), the lion's share of program budgets now goes to urban and rural poverty, education, governance and public policy, and international affairs. This is entirely understandable, given such pressing needs at home and abroad. But once again a reduced arts budget – $5.5 million in 1983, out of fifty-four million for education and culture – goes to institutions devising projects similar to the Foundation's civil rights and social justice programs. Ford describes its arts division as pursuing two goals, "cultural diversity and strengthening creativity in the performing arts," and adds, "Both goals have become increasingly interconnected, particularly since mainstream arts institutions have become more interested in culturally diverse art and audiences in recent years. At the same time, much of the new performing art the Foundation has supported has been that of minority artists and arts organizations."

One might question whether this new "interest" on the part of mainstream arts organizations, genuine though it may be, is quite as obsessive as reflected in recent foundation grants. Has this passion for culturally diverse art arisen spontaneously, or is it the result of external pressures, notably a desperate need to qualify for subsidies? Whatever the answer, there is no doubt that a lockstep mentality is ruling today's funding fashions, where the flavors of the year (or decade) are cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Examples of this can be furnished from any number of private foundations – not to mention federal, state, and civic funding agencies, and private corporations such as AT&T. The Nathan Cummings Foundation is a typical example. Its entire arts budget (approximately $800,000) goes to what the officers call "culturally specific arts institutions" and "community-based arts organizations." Well, at least this money goes directly to minority organizations and not to coercing mainstream institutions into changing their natures.

Even the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur grants, originally de-

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voted to identifying and rewarding American "genius" regardless of race or ethnic background, now has a largely multicultural agenda under its new program director, Catharine Stimpson. As a result, of the four grants awarded to performing artists this year (three to gifted people of color), the only white male recipient is listed as a "theater arts educator," whose main qualification for genius was to have founded "a theater company for inner-city children of Manhattan's Clinton Neighborhood and the Times Square welfare hotels." This project is no doubt of significant value, and its director deserves support, recognition, and funding. But the question remains: Was this award given to a "genius" or to a deeply committed social worker?

It is difficult to criticize this kind of philanthropy without being accused of insensitivity to minority artists. So at the risk of stating the obvious, let me once again emphasize my agreement that there is no shortage of truly accomplished talented individuals of every race and ethnic background and each sex in the United States. On the other hand, I believe I speak on behalf of qualified artists of every race, gender, and ethnic background when I question the *criteria* under which such grants are being awarded. It could turn out to be a serious error to reward good intentions rather than actual achievements, to inadvertently create another form of plantation paternalism, even for the sake of promoting self-esteem. Self-esteem is rarely achieved by means of abandoned standards. It may also be delusionary to assume that all the foundation dollars being poured into developing inner-city audiences are successfully democratizing American culture. What we need is some rigorous documentation regarding the impact of these grants. My own experience suggests that what typically attracts minority audiences to the arts is not mass infusions of audience development money or even special racial or ethnic projects. Rather it is the *quality* of the art itself.

Whatever its success in the minority community, the new coercive philanthropy is having a demoralizing effect on artists and artistic institutions. The entire cultural world is bending itself into contortions in order to find the right shape for grants under the new criteria. Like other institutions that poorly perform the new calisthenics, my own theater has received no money for its customary activities from Ford, Wallace, or Rockefeller for more than four years.

The pressure comes from many directions. Recently, a report issued by the American Symphony Orchestra League threatened the constituency of this service organization with loss of funding if orchestra programs didn't start to "reflect more closely the cultural mix, needs, and interests of their communities." In order to accommodate cultural

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diversity, in short, institutions of high culture were being asked to include popular, folk, and racial-ethnic expressions in their classical repertoire, as if there were not sufficient outlets for this music in the popular culture. In a typical stab at conformity with the new orthodoxy, a major symphony orchestra's management recently hired a "Diversity Initiative Consultant," who issued a memorandum to that symphony's "family" in the form of a questionnaire designed to induce "cultural awareness" and "to elicit your perceptions of the organizational culture and diversity of cultures in your work environment."

The dopey questions were framed in a benevolent enough fashion: "Have you realized that your own upbringing was not the same as other races or cultures?" "Have you avoided people of a different or certain racial, ethnic, or cultural group?" But I trust I am not alone in detecting a certain Orwellian cast to the activities of these diversity experts who roam the corridors testing everyone's sensitivity to racial slights. When they enter the corridors of culture, they inspire an atmosphere of fear, constraint, and mistrust. It may not be long before anxious employees, prodded by the batons of vigilant thought police, will be fingering fellow workers who neglect to display sufficient "tolerance" or "sensitivity" as measured by such politically correct indicators.

This insinuation of politics into culture comes at a time when tribalism has begun to shatter our national identity, when the melting pot has turned into a seething cauldron. It is only natural, under such conditions, that philanthropy should rush to the aid of racial, ethnic, and sexual groups clamoring for recognition through the agency of creative expression. But the thing about a group with special interests is that in order to achieve power, influence, strength and unity, it must display a common front. And this often means suppressing the singularity of its individual members and denying what is shared with others, neither of which are good conditions for creating the idiosyncrasy and universality associated with great art.

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KAREN WILKIN

# At the Galleries

The last fall-winter season was pretty remarkable. "So many serious shows and even some good art!" people kept saying at New York openings, in a tone of surprise. "And not just here," out-of-town visitors and recently returned travelers would add. In New York, you could see everything from a fresh look at the Impressionists to a stunning, virtually unknown collection of Indian miniatures; from retrospectives of modern masters to recent efforts by relative newcomers. If you could get to Paris or London or even Chicago, there were still other riches.

One of the most illuminating and most discussed events of the fall was *Origins of Impressionism,* at the Metropolitan, after an initial (and slightly expanded) showing in Paris. While it is hard to believe that anything remains to be said about the most popular of modern movements, the show, the first to concentrate on the 1860s, the formative decade of "the new painting" – "Impressionism" wasn't used until 1874 – brought a fascinating period of transition vividly to life. By setting works by a generation of young, ambitious painters – Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Renoir, Pissarro, and their colleagues – beside the work of artists they admired – Corot, Daubigny, and especially Courbet – as well as those they detested, the show allowed us to watch the adventurous newcomers struggle to find their own voices and to locate themselves in relation to both traditional aesthetic values and new, rather subversive notions of realism. Everyone agreed that *Origins of Impressionism* was full of superlative pictures, although a few die-hards objected to the show's modest, but admittedly didactic admixture of entrenched Academicians and the less than inspired. But that was the point. Everything in the exhibition spoke to everything else. Cross-currents, influences, affinities, and antipathies become perfectly visible, reminding us of how seamless history really is, how artists of different generations, with different conceptions of what painting can be, coexist and affect one another. No one who looked attentively at this intelligent exhibition will look at Impressionist painting in the same way again.

The Gustave Caillebotte retrospective that came to the Art Institute of Chicago from Paris, in February, was an interesting footnote to *Origins of Impressionism.* A comfortable bourgeois whose passions were

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*The Four Seasons: Winter* (1993-94) by Cy Twombly. Synthetic polymer paint, oil, pencil, and crayon on canvas. 10 ft. 3 and 1/4 inches by 6 ft. 2 and 7/8 inches. Private collection. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.

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sailing and the "new painting," Caillebotte befriended the Impressionists in the 1870s, painted with them, and bought their work. In France, he is still best known for bequeathing his large collection to the nation, when he died in 1894, at the age of forty-six. (The gift was refused, then grudgingly accepted, after three years of lobbying by the progressives; now, of course it's all in the Musee d'Orsay.) Caillebotte, the painter, was almost unknown to his compatriots, until the exhibition commemorating the centennial of his death, at the Grand Palais this fall – most of his work is in American museums or private collections – but Parisians flocked to see what they had been missing. Generally, they were rewarded. Caillebotte is often better than you'd expect. Best known for a few rather formulaic series, notable for their exaggerated "Japanese" perspective – *contre jour* figures by a balcony, floor scrapers, and figures crossing the Pont d'Europe in the rain – the show revealed that he painted some extraordinarily original, inventive pictures, as well, generous, economical compositions that sometimes seem to anticipate Matisse. But Caillebotte appears to have thought of them solely as fragmentary studies for larger works, and never pursued their implications. The cumulative impression is of someone very serious, a little plodding, who worked hard and had a wonderful time – a modest talent, but one worth taking seriously.

"Modest" was a word conspicuously absent from the most aggressively hyped show of the season in New York, the Cy Twombly retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art; the concurrent Willem de Kooning retrospective at the Metropolitan (originally at the National Gallery) ran a close second. The overlap prompted the kind of cross-generational comparisons suggested by *Origins of Impressionism*. Twombly, who seems to cherish at least the appearance of values dear to the Abstract Expressionists, is, in fact, a coeval of the Pop artists and abstract color painters who challenged these values; he's a quarter-century younger than the ninety-year-old de Kooning. Like many of his more visible contemporaries, he spent his early years as a painter in New York, and studied – like Noland, Frankenthaler, and his good friend Rauschenberg, among others – at the legendary Black Mountain College. Yet because he moved to Italy in 1957, Twombly doesn't usually enter into the equation when American art of the sixties and seventies is discussed. Not that his elegant, stylish "scribbled" paintings were ignored or lacked admirers, here or abroad. It's easy to see why. Twombly has a ravishing touch, an unfailing eye for placement and a tasty sense of *matière*. His titles suggest serious aspirations, by invoking mythology, the classical past, ancient history, literature, and the like,

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reassuring patrons that they are in the presence of Something Important, but essentially, he is an accomplished maker of refined, sophisticated, subtle, and not very demanding pictures. Now, in an access of either revisionist scholarship or astute marketing – take your pick – he is touted as the link between Pollock and the present, his vocabulary of repetitive marks interpreted as translations of Abstract Expressionism's psychologically loaded gestures into hip, upscale, educated graffiti. Much of the material on the show circulated by MOMA stressed, not always facetiously, that while Twombly's work resembled children's scribbles, it was, in fact, aesthetically conceived; the problem, however, is not that his suave doodles don't look enough like art, but rather, too much like it.

The weakness of Twombly's paintings were emphasized by the close proximity of the de Kooning retrospective. Not that de Kooning is a model of unalloyed excellence. His work of the 1940s is some of the most original, powerful, and just plain best painting done in America, but after 1950, he rarely reached the level of expressiveness and intensity set by those early pictures – except in his drawings, which remained almost consistently superb. And it is drawing that largely determines the strength of the early paintings, whether the creepily beautiful portraits of the early 1940s, the fierce Picasso-inspired figures that followed, or the astonishing, nervous black and white abstractions of 1948: a language of articulate edges, of fluent, responsive, wristy lines that not only define shapes, but bite into space, carving out a shallow, unstable zone in which planes with unnamable shapes shift and hover. (It's essentially Cubist space; Clement Greenberg's characterization of de Kooning as a late Cubist was extremely accurate.) What's missing in Twombly's speedy loops and squiggles is this sense of articulation. In de Kooning's best work, changes in the direction of lines or edges seem driven by intense perceptions and feelings about form. In Twombly's pictures – and in much of de Kooning's later work – this quality is noticeably absent. Everything stays on the surface; it seems arbitrary, even expedient. I'm not advocating depiction, but rather, wishing that pictorial events, however spontaneous, casual, or even minimal, appear to have come about because of overwhelming necessity – no matter how they were actually arrived at.

The de Kooning show raised more questions than it answered. It's hard to understand, for example, why a painter and draughtman of his gifts should devote years of his life to neutralizing his gesture, to inflating calligraphic lines into broom-sized swipes that are, in comparison to the eloquent planes of earlier works, both clumsy and mute. It is hard to know, too, why someone who was not much of a colorist – witness the

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consistent success of the black and white, and the near-monochrome pictures – should have staked so much on large expanses of dead, flat hues in a declared effort to evoke light. Hardest of all to grasp is why those sad, feeble pictures in the last room were ever exhibited. All that's left in them is a kind of mindless facility, perhaps the very facility that de Kooning strove to resist when he abandoned his fine line-drawing brush for his house painter's tool. It would be kinder not to remind us of the artist's tragic physical and mental degeneration in the last years. The contrast between his paintings of the sixties and seventies and his masterpieces of the forties was cruel enough.

Drawing issues were crucial to the recent work of the celebrated color painter, Jules Olitski, who showed canvases at Salander-O'Reilly and monotypes at Stephen Long last fall. In his new paintings – some of his best to date – Olitski abandoned the repetitive, over-scaled "paw-mark" of recent years in favor of a more cursive, all-over ploughing of the surface, making the pictures expand and breathe. The "paw mark" functioned like a building block, a rhythmic unit that automatically established an internal scale; pictures of various sizes appeared to be made by adding or subtracting units. His new drawing defines, or rather creates, expanses of infinite variety; it changes speeds and weights as we watch, subsides into dense pigment or whips back on itself when it reaches an edge, but at the same time, it echoes rhythms and gestures already established at another density and scale by the tonal and chromatic shifts of Olitski's luminous surfaces. (In some pictures, a relatively coarse spatter of clear hues provides counterpoint.) It is difficult to write about these paintings. For all their lushness and sensuousness, they are also recondite and demanding, requiring, quite literally, undivided attention over some time, in order to reveal themselves; it takes a minute or so of concentrated looking for the eye to take in Olitski's nuances of color. This is no less true of the lyrical monotypes, done at the University of Hartford, last spring, which are clear, fresh, and relatively bright, especially in relation to the brooding chiaroscuro of the canvases.

Olitski's pictures are full of feeling, but devoid of program or message. They hover at the limits of the seeable, apparently occupying a magical zone of painterly metaphor, an elusive outer boundary between pure physical *stuff* and pure emotion, yet confronted by the tonal and coloristic drama of these recent works, I often find myself thinking, not of modernism, but of how Olitski might have fared in, say, the seventeenth century. He is a marvelous raconteur, able to extract the cosmic and the comic from even casual anecdotes. Modernism and the accumulated weight of history have conspired to make it impossible for him to

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tell stories overtly in his paintings, so he has substituted material dramas for narrative ones. In his best works, he succeeds in engaging us deeply, like a brilliant storyteller, stirring our emotions with sheer *painting*.

That a picture's ability to move us has less to do with *what* is (or isn't) depicted than with *how* it is painted is a commonplace enough idea, but it was given currency by a serendipitous pairing of two exhibitions, *Goya: Truth and Fantasy, The Small Paintings* and *Odilion Redon: Prince of Dreams*, at the Art Institute of Chicago. The Goya show was, at first glance, an assortment of pictures brought together only because they were not large. Some were studies, reduced versions of proposed commissions, intended to convey to patrons what they might expect, while others were complete, finished paintings, cabinet pictures whose intimate scale permitted the exploration of subjects not deemed suitable for public commissions. Still others were literal miniatures, family portraits and fantasies painted on ivory. Some were charming Rococo improvisations, idealized scenes of country life by the young Goya, familiar to us from their full-scale versions – the tapestry cartoons at the Prado – while others, from the end of the painter's life, were as ferocious and disquieting as any of the fantastic murals in his Madrid house, la Quinta del Sordo. But subject matter was not the issue; *painting* was. The most banal images of decorative young women or of a monk, held hostage, outwitting his captor – the latter lifted bodily from popular engravings – were made extraordinary and absorbing because of Goya's vigorous touch and his surprising color; the most harrowing evocations of madhouses, plagues, and witches at their rites, to say nothing of gory corridas, were dramatic as much because of the way light became something palpable or the planes of close-packed bodies pressed and shoved at one another, as because of their sinister narratives.

In the Redon exhibition, the opposite was true. The show was impeccably chosen, composed of works in pristine condition – no mean consideration, given the fragility of Redon's surfaces. The whole range of his career was represented: conventional early landscapes, high chroma "dream images," super-heated flower paintings, and the celebrated "Noirs" – the proto-surrealist, nightmare drawings and prints. There was no lack of arresting images, especially among the Noirs: the "cactus man," the floating eyeball, the deserted dream-landscape, and all those vignettes where spaces expand and contract at will. But they never ceased to be anything other than illustrations. I kept thinking of Goya's Caprichos, the renowned "monsters" begotten by "the sleep of reason," where means and imagery are interchangeable, and agitated stroke line, and tone are as expressive as any of the threatening creatures they evoke.

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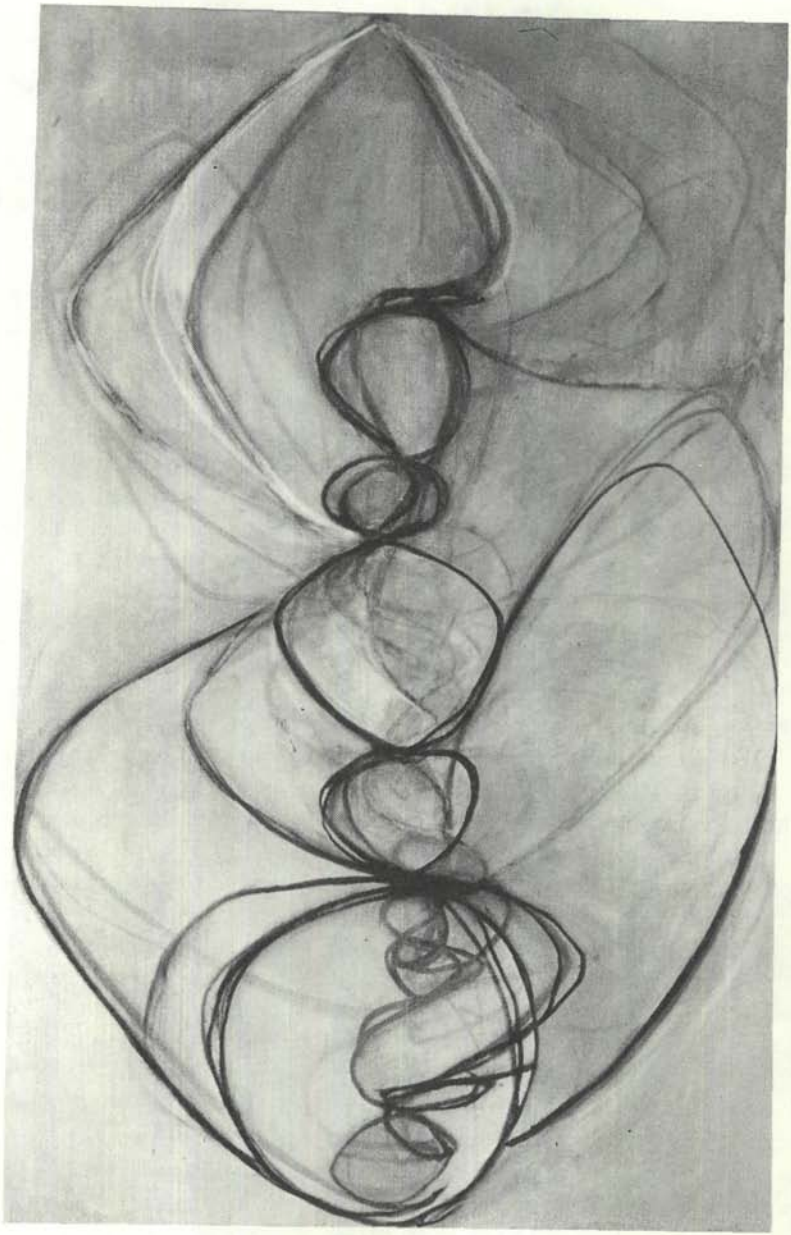

*Shade* (1994) by Jill Moser. Oil/canvas. 80 by 60 inches. Courtesy of Black and Greenberg Gallery.

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Imagination alone is not enough. The real surprise of the show, in fact, was the suggestion that Redon's real talents were not fantastic, but domestic. A series of large-scale decorative panels, screens, and tapestries were among the freshest, most unexpected works in the exhibition.

Works by less familiar artists also provided some of the chief pleasures of the past season, notably Jill Moser's paintings and drawings, and Clay Ellis's sculptures, both at Black and Greenberg. Moser is best known for her drawings, which remain among her strongest efforts, with their searching, smudged contours and chains of looping forms. Her paintings share related images and a related facture, with subtle variations of a restrained, slightly acidic palette taking the place of the tonal shifts of the drawings. She has looked hard and profitably at Matisse, learning how eloquent the visible record of a drawing's history can be, but where her mentor's quest was for lines that definitively described the body's articulation in space, Moser's is for something more abstract. There's something vaguely body-like about her swelling, linked ovals and a suggestion that they turn in space, but the crucial issue is their relation to one another and to the two-dimensional shape and proportion of the sheet or the canvas. Her best works are intelligent, tense, and absorbing; she's someone to watch with interest.

Ellis, who is well known in his native Canada, but has been seen only once before in New York, showed a single large steel sculpture and a group of smaller works cast in iron and bronze that hovered between landscape and body-ness. The best of these retained a sense of the weight of molten metal, the slump of sandcasting, but played crisper, geometric forms against soft-edged ones. The most successful had a sense of place, at the same time that they read as distinctive, single objects. The larger piece, at once stupa-like and unnamable, swelled and curled in a potent upthrust. Without looking anything specific in Indian sculpture or architecture, it managed to suggest characteristics of both: the sense of boneless, but solid form, of suppleness, of burgeoning growth, and pregnant mass. Moser's show inaugurated Black and Greenberg, with Ellis following, an auspicious start for this ambitious new gallery. If it continues as it has begun, Black and Greenberg will be an obligatory stop on Soho visits.

Just across Grand Street, at Paul Kasmin Gallery, and at more or less the same time, Suzanne McClelland's new paintings – her best to date – should have been another obligatory stop. Like Moser, McClellan's strength lies in her drawing, in generous full-arm gestures and a wide repertory of changed marks. I would have said that color didn't count for much in her slightly murky, brown-black-cream canvases – or doesn't help, given the inert pinkish "licks" in one picture – except for the way

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*Buddha's Ear* (1993) by Clay Ellis. Stained steel. 106 by 50 by 52 inches. Courtesy of Black and Greenberg Gallery.

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a subtle swell of blue and a blush of pale rose determined the off-balance, enlivening rhythm of one outstanding picture. Generally, though, the more drawing-like, the more dramatic and arresting McClelland's quirky paintings are. I liked least the ones where she slapped on thick, repetitive clumps of pigment, and liked best those where she gave full vent to her ability to orchestrate washes, smudges, and rough lines. McClelland has been on the scene for about a decade and she keeps getting better and better.

Other delights? David Smith's little known anti-war reliefs, the Medals for Dishonor, at Matthew Marks. Often seen as an aberration, an insignificant deviation from his better-known free-standing constructed sculpture, Smith's reliefs are, in fact, pivotal to his development. He began as a painter and started to make sculpture via exaggerated collage elements on his canvases. The Medals, moreover, made between 1937 and 1940, explicitly state sexually-loaded themes of violence and brutality that persist in more or less disguised forms throughout Smith's work in all media, even the most seemingly abstract. A large selection of working drawings and related works, including some of the original plasters used in casting, allowed us to trace the evolution of these images, while documentary material hinted at some of Smith's less savory sources and confirmed the depth of his obsessions. At once reminiscent of Mesopotamian and Cretan seal stones and of Picasso, at once period pieces and oddly current, the series warrants close study, not in the least because of how *sculptural* these presumably two-dimensional objects really are, with deep convexities and bulging forms set in opposition to delicate ridges and incisions. It would be interesting to see the series within a larger context of Smith's work – we're overdue for a serious, complete Smith retrospective – but in the meantime, it's good to have the opportunity to scrutinize these troubling works.

The biggest surprise – and one of the most spectacular exhibitions – of the past season was the Brooklyn Museum's celebration of its magnificent, too-little known collection of Indian paintings, *Realms of Heroism*. The theme, the conception of the hero, both mythical and temporal – his virtues, his education, his accomplishments, his amours, his feats of valor – served as a framework for a wide range of images. Elegant depictions of the Mughal court, evocative landscapes with scenes from the Ramayana, vernacular illustrations from collections of ragas, meticulous botanical drawings, mysterious religious texts, enchanting animals, demons, liquid-eyed beauties, and more, made for a dazzling show. Generally more intensely colored than their Persian equivalents – and often larger – the Indian paintings in Brooklyn's collection should be re-

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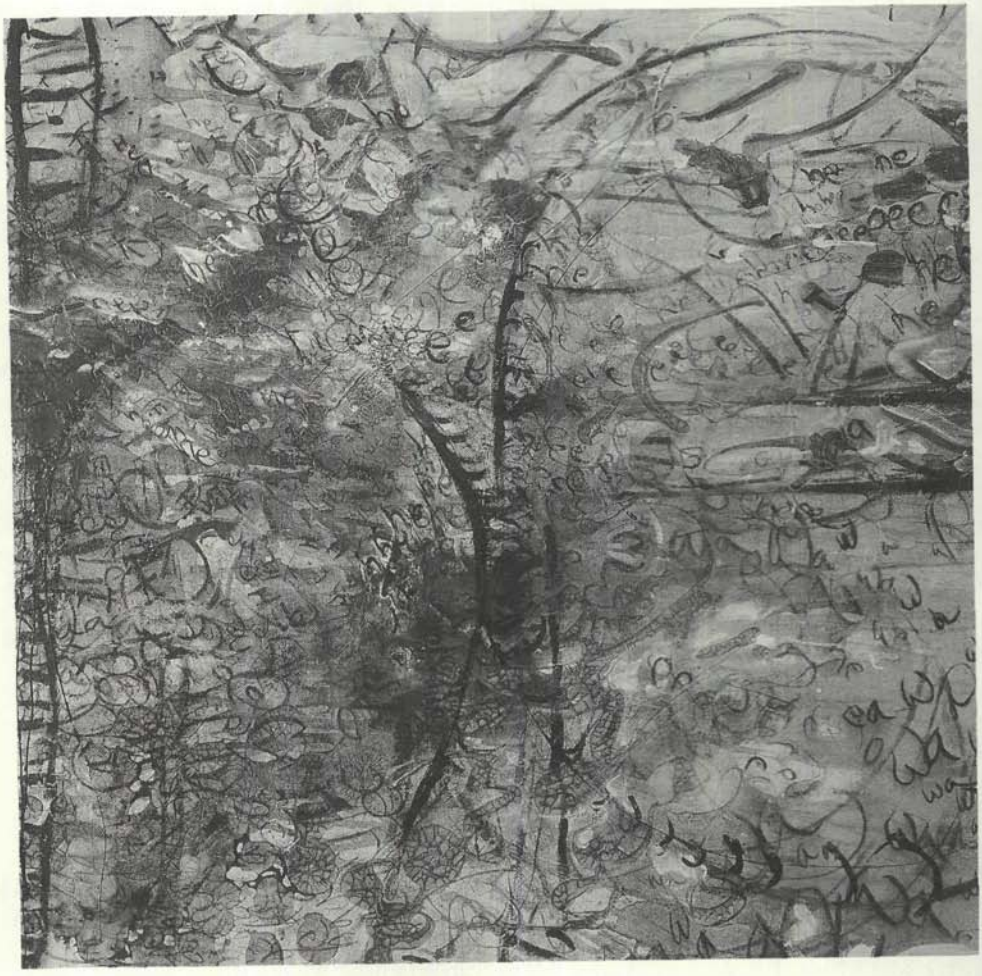

*he* (1994) by Suzanne McClelland. Charcoal, Acrylex, dry pigment, enamel and gesso on canvas. 72 by 72 inches. Courtesy of Paul Kasmin Gallery.

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quired study for aspiring painters who could learn a lot about how (literally) burnished saffron yellow, dull orange, and cinnabar red can coexist with pale celadon green, to say nothing of how strange lavenders and blues can set off a range of pinks, or how pattern and expanses of unmodulated color can create subtle, ambiguous structure. The sheer visual pleasure of the Brooklyn show would have been its own justification, but since the exhibit coincided with the publication of an excellent, very handsome catalogue of the collection – a twenty year effort – all that scholarship added another, enriching layer. The wall texts were, for once, interesting, richly informative, intelligent, and intelligible. A splendid education in the nuances of the infinitely varied culture of the subcontinent, the texts enhanced your perception of the more arcane aspects of the works, while allowing their aesthetic merits to speak for themselves. Even the hanging helped; lower than normal placement reminded you that these works were meant to be held for viewing, like pages in a book. The show was a triumph, for the museum, for its department of Asian art, and for the exhibition's dedicated curator Amy G. Poster. The only puzzle is why more attention wasn't paid to this perfectly wonderful event.

The oddest exhibition of the past few months was *New, New Painting,* organized by Galerie Gerald Pilzer, Paris, at Salander-O'Reilly. (Apparently, it's not just politics that makes strange bedfellows.) The title obviously nods at the artists of *Origins of Impressionism*, but there all resemblance ends. What distinguishes the new "new painters" is their embrace of twentieth-century materials, specifically state-of-the-art acrylic paint, with all the additives and modifiers presently available. They revel in acrylic's plastic sheen, its ability to be thick, to hold the imprint of a tool; they emphasize the potential of acrylic color, originally developed for commercial uses, to be brilliant, luminous, and traffic-stopping visible. Lexan, mylar, holograms – you name it – they've tried it. Most of the group manifests their belief that by manipulating materials and remaining alert to what happens during the process, expressive and significant art can be achieved, a notion I also subscribe to, given my experience of studios and the evidence of a good deal of powerful modernist painting and sculpture. But it's not as simple as it sounds. Intuition and perhaps even intention count for a great deal. Choices have to be made throughout the process, decisions to retain or destroy what develops, to add, subtract, or stop – all informed by talent, experience, and taste. It is unquantifiable and, except for technical aspects of how to control materials, probably unteachable. Both very good, personal, expressive art and very bad, arbitrary, empty art has been produced by these methods, just as

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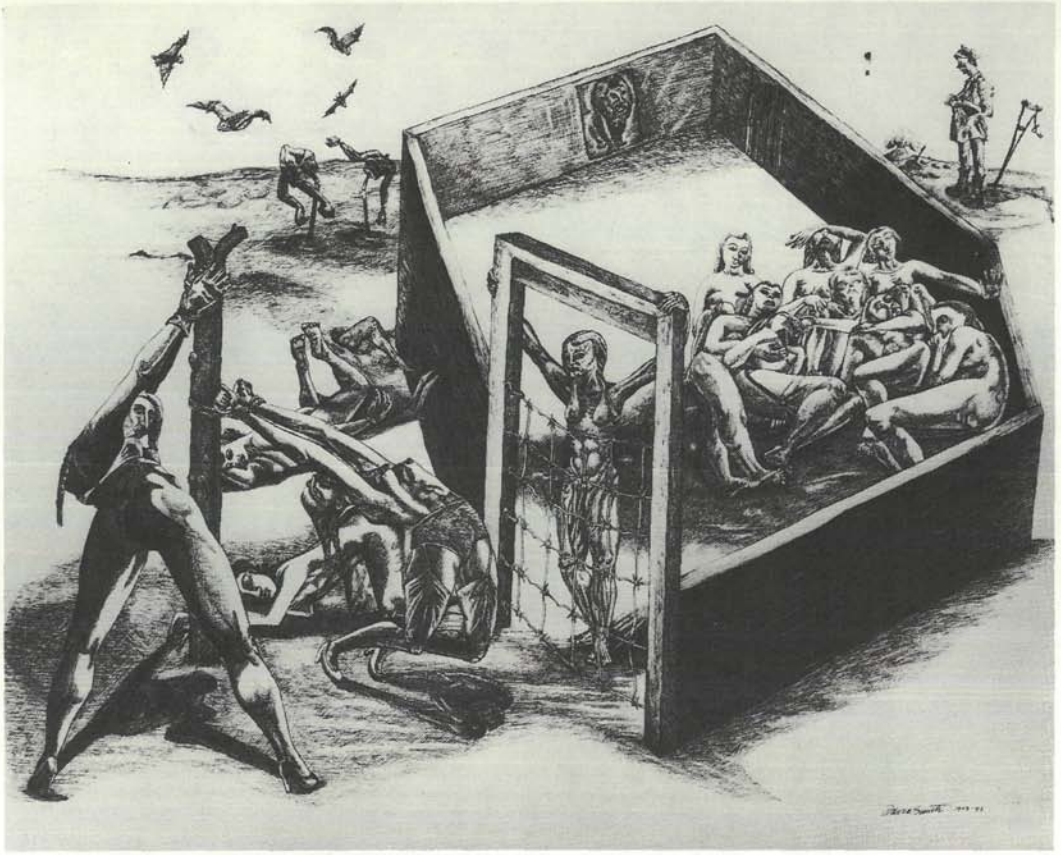

*Untitled* (1942-43) by David Smith. Ink on paper. 19 and 1/2 by 24 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery.

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good and bad art has been made in traditional ways. The curious thing about the new "new painters" is how alike they all seem, in spite of their evident belief in the power of personality to transform inert matter. But matter – mostly slick, glossy, garish paint – dominates, homogenizing images, gestures, shapes, and inflections that should provide vivid testimony to the presence of the individual. Admirers of the movement tell me that the slickness, the gloss, and the day-glo intensity are part of the point. If so, these qualities, along with the up-to-the-minute, mass-produced facture would seem to demand some kind of irony or deadpan detachment, but it's all dreadfully earnest and humorless. Perhaps it's unfair to judge from a single group show. In the past, for example, I've seen individual works by some of the new "new painters" – Joseph Drapell, Roy Lerner, Marjorie Minkin, in particular – which I've found more convincing, but I'm afraid that much of *New, New Painting* made you long for just the plain "new" or even the "old, old."

For that, your best bet was the Morgan Library, where the Thaw Collection of drawings served as a touchstone of excellence. Spanning the Renaissance to the twentieth century, from vigorous pen and ink Rembrandts to pastel-enhanced monotypes by Degas, from lively, moralizing Goyas to cool, detached Cézannes, from a hyper-elegant Ingres portrait to an explosive "psychoanalytical" Pollock, the selection of works renewed your faith in such beleaguered notions as connoisseurship, judgment, excellence, taste, and, I am afraid, the power of money – not that money would have made any difference, if those other unfashionable elements hadn't been brought into play.

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# FICTION

**NORMAN MANEA**

# The Black Envelope

In the kiosk window, the lovely curled head of a spring morning. Small black eyes. Crimson lips, pink-enamel cheeks.

"The newspapers? They're just coming. The papers will be ready in a second."

The men huddling around the window came to life.

The girl moved back inside the kiosk to arrange the stacks of papers. The pavement was no longer large enough. There were pedestrians darting everywhere, casting impatient glances to left and right – wave upon wave of bustling ants. The line for the papers grew longer.

"I haven't got any more *Flacaras,*" announced the soprano. "And this one is the last *România Libera*. You can whistle for *Filatelia* and *Pescarul* – they're real vintage wine. No, I haven't got *Rebus*. Maybe tomorrow."

The tall, pale man moved beside the lamppost with a bundle of fresh papers under his arm. He opened them up and began skimming through.

"What could have got into them?" grumbled a little old woman leaning on the rubbish bin. "Newspapers – lining up for the paper, would you believe it. Stupid brats. As if they'd find anything out by reading them. I tell you, sir, they're the same. All the same! Money down the drain, I say!"

But the tall man with white hair, beard, and mustache, all perfectly trimmed, did not hear her. Nor did he hear the tapping of heels on the asphalt or see the rainbow skirts fluttering in the breeze, or the brief glitter of golden stockings. The gentleman neither heard nor saw anything, absorbed as he was in leafing through the papers.

"That's what people are like. They forget quickly," the elderly voice

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continued. "We've got this lovely country, this heavenly climate. But you can't do anything with just nature, you bunch of good-for-nothings! It's man who does everything, with those brains of his. That's why we've got into this mess. Look at them, they've even forgotten the winter. They've forgotten the horror of it. They don't even care – they're off goggling at women. People forget quickly, sir, I'm telling you."

The man did not hear. Disappointed, the old woman stepped sideways towards a wrinkled man who kept shaking his empty shopping bag.

"Too true, too true!" muttered the aged hunchback. "My wife died on me this winter. It was because they didn't give us any heating. They kept us in the cold all winter. She had heart trouble, so the cold finished her off. Yes sir, how people forget! They don't give a damn," the old man erupted in the direction of the elegant gentleman leaning against the post and absorbed in his reading. "Look at them! Minds like sieves. You can do what you like to them and they'll forget it. Just give them a little pleasure – a fine day, a pretzel – yes, they forget as soon as you give them a pretzel and a bit of sun. That's what people are like."

The smart-looking man did not seem to feel that the stranger's fury was aimed at him. Probably he did not even hear. He gathered together the bundle of papers and tore himself away from the lamppost.

The compass of his legs opened wide. Beanstalk strides, but slowly, because he was rather short of energy. A happy street, it was true. Picturesque Bucharest, feminine and sprightly – just like the Petit Paris of old. If only there were not this poverty and gasping all around, and this clumsy, artificial happiness. Happy spring. Happy forgetful people. Happy papers, too. Optimistic, pedagogic, ever holding forth about the future, the radiant future, whoever might be around to see it.

The kitchen table. Bread, milk. The white starched tablecloth. He had to get up at the break of day to find some bread and milk. Two steaming cups. Coffee substitute with milk – a substitute because real coffee was so hard to come by. Anyway, old age is itself a substitute. And our entire country a nation of senior citizens. Slices of hard black bread thinly smeared with plum jam. But the spoon, knife, and plates sparkle like new. Everything is clean and fresh. Windows open to let in the elixir, the venom, the illusion. Like spring.

Mrs. Gafton thumbed through her newspapers. She put her glasses on, took a sip from her cup, glanced at the front pages, then gave up. Anyway, she never had time to read except in the evening, after all the chores were done. She pushed the pile toward her husband at the end of the table.

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"At least our climate's still wonderful. What if we only had winter? Or only summer? Harmony is so important! And we've certainly got it here. How lucky we are!"

Her husband looked hard and long at her.

"Yes, in fact someone was saying that just a while ago, in the newspaper line. Spring is like a gift of nature! Not youth any longer, but still a rebirth, eh? A real provocation."

His wife took off her glasses, put them on the heap of papers, and looked down into her cup. After a few moments of silence, she began to whisper. Yes, whisper.

"Do you still know when Franz Joseph died?"

"Eh? What's got into you now?"

"I don't know, just a bit of nonsense. I'm mixing things up. Well, you used to say he was a tolerant emperor."

The husband smiled. He was familiar with these morning antics.

Signs of tenderness and support for his studies. She did not ask him anything about his work; she knew it would only annoy him before he set off for the library. Anyway, he always talked about it again in the evening.

But in the morning she usually found various coded expressions to indicate that his work obsessed her, too.

"In fact, I was thinking: when did Caesar, Nero? I mean, when did they . . . ? And what about Franco, or Salazar? Mussolini I know – it was in the spring, wasn't it? And it was the same with the Führer: he set fire to himself in the spring. But that other guy with a mustache, the Georgian, he croaked in March. I couldn't possibly forget it. Is it the siege of spring? Or like a whirlwind. Something unstoppable."

The husband tugged at the pile of papers, laying his gold-rimmed glasses beside the cup. The woman primped her hair, gray and tight at the back of her head.

"Yes, a siege, as you say. The onslaught of change. Something uncertain, unstoppable. Let me read you a little story from today's paper. Just let anyone say nothing ever happens here."

He smoothed the corner of the tablecloth. The woman stood up, breadbasket in hand. He looked at her. The day's moment of peace. Breakfast gave him strength. It was a calm reference point at the start of a new day, before all the running and jostling around, the lines, library cards, letters to the authorities, more lines.

"Listen: 'The facts, as we will briefly relate them here, seem to have been taken from a film about the Ku Klux Klan or some gang of witch-hunters. The hunting of witches in the neighborhood.' Listen, don't you want to listen?"

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The woman slowly arranged the cups and tableware in the sink. Moving slowly, halfheartedly, she tilted to one side as she limped with her left leg. But then she came back and sat down. Her pale plump hands again rested dutifully together on the immaculate tablecloth.

"So they burst into the woman's apartment. And then, what do you think? They set fire to it. Can you imagine? Because she loved animals, do you hear? Because she had cats or dogs, or who knows what she had. It won't reveal the pretext on which they did it, or the means they used. The woman's name and address are also being withheld. Don't you see? And So-and-so, who claims to be on the local council, is in league with the instigators, with the other tenants in the block. You see the connection, don't you? Do you see how it all fits together?"

His wife stared at him without smiling. She was used to his obsession for linking the day's events to his research in the library. She knew his habit of returning again and again to things that happened forty years ago. This time, though, there was something special in his voice. It seemed like a crowning moment, a final and decisive test she did not understand. But she did understand his excitement – a kind of unexpected victory and, yes, panic. A long-suppressed panic that both confirmed his expectations and gave him new life, as it were.

An hour later, then, Mr. Matei Gafton was asking the librarian for more volumes than usual and, for some strange reason, stood with a blank look for a long time before touching the piles in front of him. But he did check them carefully. Decree No. 966 of April 7, 1941, introducing harsher penalties for the crime of high treason and espionage. Plumyene and Lasierra, *Les fascismes françaises;* General Ion Antonescu, *The Basis of the National-Legionary State,* September-October 1940; Lucretiu Patrascanu, *Under Three Dictatorships,* Editura politica, Bucharest 1970; *The Graziani Trial,* Rome, 1948-1950; Decree No. 966 of April 7, 1941, prohibiting the marriage of civil servants with foreigners or Jews; *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression,* Washington, 1946 . . . He knew them all: they no longer satisfied him. The epidemic spread, the confusion – so many deceptive little hopes, until the invisible trap snaps shut and it is too late, with nothing more to be done. Yesterday the disease was still next door or at the next-door neighbors'; today it is inside you and it is too late. The roots of evil are in each prisoner, not just in the butchers. Hunters and victim, fire, a kind of lynching, and the pretexts do not matter in the slightest: it could have been anyone at all.

It would be too simple an explanation, really too simple. That spring is to blame? Spring, like forty years ago? A delayed encounter of

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which you are no longer capable, exhausted from adapting to so many snares, at every moment. The pretext – who would believe it? – was cats!

"Are you leaving already?" The blonde behind the counter was evidently intrigued.

He shrugged his shoulders, feeling guilty.

He sauntered along the boulevard. Spring. Words. Spring made up of words. Trotyl. Dust. Red. Cherry. Delicate buds as in an advertisement. A dog and a cat. Blows, fire, hooligans, crowbars, destruction of the apartment, the blaze. Earth, air, water, and fire. Oxygenation, aphrodisiacs, aggression, the venom of loneliness. Spring, roll of words.

He sat down on a bench in the small dusty park. Words: the mind is forever producing words; you hear them flowing all the time inside you. Destruction. Fire. Crowbars, blows. Spite. Red. Crematorium. Mayflies. The look and the body of mayflies. Magnetic encounters, the grating silk, morbid idylls, night breeze. The fancies of tiredness wrapped him in words, as in a protective film. Absent moments – he knew the danger of such senile flights.

Maybe he should go to Tolea's, to show him the magazine. Tolea's reactions are childish and unpredictable: they mimic vitality well and even radiate a kind of therapeutic irritation. He might start shouting or cursing, or set the magazine alight, or quite simply throw him out as an intruder. Well, it's hard to say who the intruder is. After all, Tolea, not he, is the tenant. So yes, it would be good to visit Tolea, especially since he didn't do it very often; the tenant would have no reason to complain. Not very often – but then the last time was just yesterday.

He had knocked timidly. No answer. But Tolea was home. He felt that Tolea was in but did not want to open the door. He knocked again, once, twice, then cautiously opened the door. Mr. Tolea Voinov barely turned his head. He seemed to recognize the intruder but did not honor him with any gesture. The man remained at the door, unsure whether to enter. The waiting lasted only a moment. The host cut through the air with his legs and bounded straight up to the guest.

"So, old good-fellow! Just as well you've come."

Bowing down to the ground. Then a step sideways to make room for the eminent guest, who decided on the only possible course: he smiled. He looked at the professor and beamed. Yes, the tenant was the same. White ribbed trousers, white sweater, white tennis shoes. Shaven, bald, fresh. Yes, there was no mistaking him. He sat down on one of the two chairs in the tiny room.

"I've got bad news."

"Thank God!" The professor crossed himself. "Let it all out, then.

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I'll offer you a coffee as a reward. Get if off your chest, *panie!* You'll have a real coffee, *hundert prozent,* not like the piss that's drunk in our multilaterally developed society. If the news is serious – I mean, bad – you'll get a super-coffee, straight from Allah's kettle."

He circled the pigsty, among books, ties, notebooks, shopping bags, and like a conjurer fished a thermos and cup out of thin air. There was the coffee. A big, green, full cup on the metal table between the two chairs.

"Just for me?"

"I've already drunk a tankful; my pistons are racing away. Sip it slowly – don't rush. Relax while you're getting the calamities ready. I'm all yours today, Citizen Matei. You found me in – my tough luck."

The guest sipped, smiled, put it off.

"To make it easier for both of us, let me do the explaining," the professor began impatiently. "Let me tell you what it's about. Otherwise you'll keep beating around the bush all the way to Katmandu. Come on, out with it: you need this room. I've got to free the burial chamber. Yes?"

The guest nearly choked on his drink.

"No, no, not at all. What I was going to say was that big staff cuts are in the offing. What's in your file will count. As in the fifties. That's it: losing your job isn't a joke. And as you see, there's no longer any way I can help you."

He spewed it all out and breathed a sigh of relief. A long silence followed – a kind of crumbling, a loss of contact.

Finally, the professor's voice. Sharp, rejuvenated.

"As a pensioner you take interest in all sorts of monkey business, isn't that right? I've heard that you write to the authorities every day. Is it to atone for your sins of the fifties? You were a journalist in those days and you scribbled any old lie they wanted, plus a lot they maybe didn't ask you for but which you believed. Now you're trying to make up for the past. So you write demands, appeals, suggestion. You criticize and notify and propose. A volunteer, a really stubborn journalist! Brave, ready to help us poor sinners. You were saying that political files are back, like in the fifties? But that things won't repeat themselves? Then why don't you write all that down? Nowadays courage is not such a big thing, and the pension arrives every month. You help us sinners, isn't that right? Maybe you'll find me another job. After all, a century ago you were at the Polytechnic together with my brother, now an Argentinian citizen living in that madhouse called Buenos Aries. One of the most beautiful in the world, says our friend Marga. And he knows about these things,

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working in a madhouse himself."

The guest was bent over, the cup still in his hand. But Tolea was not looking at him.

"What do you want me to do? To ask your Argentinian colleague for help? To ask my charming brother? For charity? The boss has gone kaput, you know. What's to be done? Swimming pool, car, farm, house, bank accounts, holidays – it's all very tiring, Shall I write to him about childhood years, the fireplace, the parental home? Tears will flow and he'll be off to see a psychiatrist."

"Come on, don't exaggerate. it seems he's already written to you."

"Of course, of course, I've had nothing but delights. Correspondence! Abroad! Capitalist countries! Military-fascist dictatorships! Relatives who were drawn from the country by the mirage of money and an easy life, and who send us their convertible charity at Easter and Christmas. I'm just a substitute, Comrade Gafton! A relic of the past dressed up as a scapegoat. That's the word they used in the political seminars, wasn't it? But who knows? You might offer me some compensation that leads to a job. A paid hobby. Not paid like your new occupation, which is really unpaid heart-searching. What do you say? Will you take me on?

"I don't understand. I don't understand a thing."

"So you don't understand. Well, if someone doesn't understand, it has to be explained to them, right? Do you remember the 'great tragedy'?"

Gafton remained silent. He shifted his weight from the left to the right side of his body.

"The family tragedy! Death, sir, that's the only type of tragedy there is. Death. The Great Scriptwriter hired us for that, didn't he? So, death . . . You do remember the funeral? I mean, what happened with Father then?"

"Yes, of course I do," the guest quickly broke in.

"Goo-ood, so you remember. What was it: suicide, murder, accident? Or don't you remember anymore? Maybe you don't. You had a different name – everything had a different name."

"How's that? What do you mean?"

"How's that, how's that! Look, surely you're not going to tell me your name was Gafton in those days. Or am I wrong? Well anyway, let's skip the details. So now you're a journalist working from home."

"From where did you – " The journalist blushed, paled, reddened, all of a sudden.

"No harm done, *panie,* nothing to be ashamed of. Some will-o'-

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the-wisps can be nice and innocent; they're not all mean and vile. Your recent one, like the first, is humanitarian enough. It's just more congenial, because it's useless and unpaid. So now you write as a correspondent of the masses. Goo-ood. Letters instead of articles, right? Right. Like those Latin American policemen who decide to form their own gangs to have a crack at the villains – but as private individuals using police expertise. Good. Only you have other passions. I was going to say manias – excuse me. So you investigate! You examine the past to forget the present, or to understand it better. Of course, it's not my business. But it is also, or could also become, mine. I mean, why don't we concern ourselves with the same period, for different purposes? Only I'd be paid for it. What do you say?"

"No. I don't understand what you're after."

"What I'm after? To get excited about something, that's what. To find a conjuring act. A game, a hobby, as they say in the capitalist paradise. Not to be bored any longer! Even death is not a greater tragedy than boredom. The Old Scriptwriter likes us to amuse him, doesn't he? After all, that's why he created us.

"So, could I take part in your great work? I'm drawing up trees of my family and also looking into the mysterious chapter in its story. What do you say? Others don't know what I'm like, but when I think of the hearth back home, of my childhood years, I'm ready to start writing the memoirs of my decimated family! Will you pay for my help, then? How about it?"

It became quiet again. As the silence continued to grow, the professor felt he had probably gone rather too far.

"Let me make you another coffee, sir. I haven't anything else to offer. You don't drink or smoke, I know, and I can't offer you one of my ladies, as they've got the day off today. But a genuine coffee – in our times that's a real provocation, believe me. Almost an attack on social harmony. Just think: a kilo of coffee on the black market costs a whole month's wages."

The other man did not reply. The window was darkening as evening fell. His movements grew slower, his voice less distinct.

"No," the voice could be heard at last, "it's late and I don't sleep well anyway. Let's talk about your job, instead."

"Pah, what is there to talk about? I understand that you can't help me. You're not the official journalist you once used to be, so you can't work shoulder to shoulder again with mad Marga, the loonies' doctor, to save me and take me away to the famous capital to work in the sought-after post of receptionist at the Hotel Cunty. I'm sorry, I know you're not so keen on slang. Let's say Hotel Pussy – that's the popular

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expression."

"Yes. It won't be easy to find you a job. But that's not the most difficult problem."

"Well, if there's a more difficult one, we're really in for it! In fact, I'm just starting to correspond with Argentina."

"It's the business with that hotel. But you know what things are like there. The staff, the various connections and obligations."

"Ah! So you know the network, I see. You must have worked in that branch as well! After all, you've practiced all the trades, including that of professional revolutionary, haven't you? Isn't that so? Tell me, isn't that so?"

"Stop playing the fool. No one will believe you were a receptionist who knew of nothing but work and wages, day shift and night shift, for a fortnight at a stretch. A receptionist at that hotel is not the best of recommendations. Or only if you want to be taken on as a flunky. You know what I mean."

"Sure I do. It means we can't go on discussing it in the dark, comrade. They mustn't think there's a conspiracy, Comrade Gafton – that we've taken advantage of the dark."

Suddenly the light came on, another one of Tolea's tricks. A candle-thin bulb, held up by a metal clasp attached to the table leg. A weak light, just enough to outline the Roman-consul face of the receptionist. Perfectly shaved, almost too pale.

"Now that you mention it, m'sieur, you're going to end up in really hot water with those freelance journalist's letters. A petitioner for the good of humanity! I didn't understand that business with your name, either. Why should you be doing good under a changed name? After all, my ancestors or yours changed their names for quite different reasons, didn't they, eh? Aliens that we are, isn't that so?"

No answer could be heard, not even a whimper.

"Was it all for effect that you took your wife's name? Precisely after the war? Because she had one of those brothers, a Heil Heil man, but she herself was innocent? And in the fifties you risked your spotless record as an apostle just to defend the principle of objectivity! Is that how you justified it to yourself? Like that, Herr Gafton?"

Nothing from Herr Gafton, not a word. Or rather yes, there did come a whisper. "I thought you might try some translating for a while. You can still find a connection at one of those cooperatives that do technical translations. Or even at a publisher's. It would help out until something else comes along."

"A translator, goo-ood! *Tradutore traditore,* or however it goes. We

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all translate, it's become the law of survival, hasn't it? Good. We're all replacements and translators, no?"

"But what about the translator's file? His *curriculum vitae,* his police record? His mother, father, brothers, and sisters, political affiliations – kept particularly for special cases! Argentina's a special case, isn't it? The Argentine circus: generals who are continually visiting this country because we're sister Latins and sister menageries, isn't that so? And then, *gospodin,* what do you know about the post of receptionist at the temple of fornicators? There's no way you can know, *panie.* For the time being we are killed by messengers, by intermediaries, not by the Chief Star and his Saints. Petty auxiliaries, substitutes – even me. A substitute, sir, you know what I mean only too well. It's a world of substitutes, this circus of ours. Any tenant on the flattened planet knows it already. Anyone knows it, my dear sir. Even you do, I'm sure."

The professor remained in the weak candlelight, while Herr Matai received in darkness, and in silence, the words streaming from the tenant Anatol Dominic Vancea Voinov, called Tolea.

After a pause for breath, Herr Matai finally replied.

"As a matter of fact, I came here to suggest – why hide it? If you need some – to be blunt, if you need some money. I'm not a man of wealth, you know. Still, I came to offer you – I would be able – I'm prepared to –"

"As a loan, eh?"

"Well, of course. Otherwise . . ."

"Goo-ood. Perfect! As a loan, I accept. Look, *Panie* Matei, I accept. I agree about the loan. Any time, any way, any amount. I was afraid that when you left I might find an envelope stuffed with crisp notes. You're still sitting in the dark there. You could easily slip me your delicate gift without being seen. I don't like philanthropists, you know. I'm glad you don't belong to that dubious category. You're even a little stingy, Mr. Grafton, sir. I hope you don't mind the fact that I was watching. I confess an unshakable respect for this imposing sign of seriousness. Meanness is a serious matter: it deserves every honor! Only simpletons think it's a defect. It makes me all the more moved by your offer, you realize."

The professor was speaking very fast, his eyes turned away from the other man and almost glued to the black window. The sentences seemed to ricochet from the glass in which the darkness of night was reflected. He half felt that his guest had stood up and was right beside the window, that Gafton-the-beanstalk was already on his left, bent over an invisible shadow. He felt, or maybe he didn't – and anyway, he didn't care

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– that the blockhead had already turned around, slowly, that his smooth pate was like a bright sphere beneath a thin aura of rush light. Yes, he had moved the clasp and lightbulb to a shelf so that its holy light fell on the bald head, and now he was looking astonished at the beanstalk, as if he had only just discovered his presence.

"Have I annoyed you in some way, sir? Is it my shameless good humor? It's just harmless playacting, really. You should ignore it. Don't worry, I'm not such a bore as to pester you with my melodramatics. As for the loan, make it some other day. When the time comes. When we start our walks down memory lane."

Then he fell silent. Probably he was gathering strength for the last bombshell. And his voice became grave, calm, low, without any sharpness.

"You know, sir, I don't care about anything. I really don't care about anything. Do you remember my father? He thought he'd escape. Philosopher! Sorbonne! *Magna cum laude!* Pah! and he built up a stock of wine – to escape. He thought he'd escape: wine is an ever necessary fuel. Including in days of wrath – especially then. Just look at how everyone jostles in lines to get some of that stinking sawdust-and-garbage wine. The receptionist at the Hotel Vancea doesn't care whether he escapes or not! I don't care about anything, remember. But that one did. Philosopher, Sorbonne! When he realized what awaited him in the paradise he'd gone back to, he went into hiding. Relations, money, wine stocks – we'll shake all that off. That's what the philosopher thought. He didn't escape, as you know; he didn't escape. And as for me, I don't care even if I do escape somehow. I really don't, you know. My indifference is harder than a diamond! It is a diamond indifference, sir, harder than the heart of His Majesty the Chief Scriptwriter, hidden everywhere, never to be found. Everywhere and nowhere, a fine old trick."

He had suddenly opened the window. The darkness rushed in – swift, perfumed, cunning. A sudden lashing. The professor tottered, raised himself up, and took his guest by the shoulders.

With an air of boredom he had gently pushed him toward the door, into the night. And that had been only yesterday.

"You're back?" the library blonde murmured in astonishment.

Pensioner Matei Gafton gave a smile of complicity. He was a regular customer, as they say. But although he spent much of his time at the library, he hesitated to give any explanation.

"Yes, I've given up the idea of going home. I'd only disturb my wife, who'll be giving private lessons there until this evening. And my

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friend and neighbor was out looking for the Great Scriptwriter." The reader smiled at his own joke, happy to be back with the joys of reading.

"I had a bit of a rest in a park. It's an aggressive spring, I'd say," added the distinguished reader, timidly and conspiratorially, as he went toward his usual place at the back, beside the window.

Soon, therefore, columns of books and old newspapers were rising high on Mr. Matei Gafton's desk.

*The Activity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the Regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu,* published by the Dacia-Traian National Society of Book Publishing and Graphic Arts, 1943; the *Decree of October 1940 on the Reorganization of Romanian Sport;* the *Decree of October 1942 on Propaganda, Danger, and the Existence and Interests of the State,* 1940, 1942, 1943; *Romanianization commissioners, penalties for high treason, death for deportees who surreptitiously return to Romania.* Yes, it was all there. The *decree prohibiting marriage with foreigners or Jews;* the *Graziani Trial; The introduction of harsher penalties for high treason and espionage,* to which he had settled down; the *Appeal of 65 Romanian intellectuals to Ion Antonescu in April 1994 for the withdrawal of Romania from the war.* And then, of course, there were the papers and, oh yes, the books. The librarian already knew the menu.

But the studious pensioner did not feel like doing any more research that afternoon. Spring was sabotaging his reading and study. The room was deserted – just a few elderly maniacs. He might be considered one himself, with all those index cards and quotations for a work that no one had asked for, expected, or wanted. His head ached. No, he could not do any work today. Let spring take the blame: the restlessness, the migraine . . . a delayed encounter not suitable for captives who have long been broken in. That bewildering upheaval – a mirage in which you could not have any confidence.

Without meaning to, Mr. Gafton put his hand on his forehead to wipe away the perspiration. A whirlwind, yes, an invisible fire in the sky . . . He bent over the open notebook, his mind made up to start writing. "Ethics and justice must be the principles of both the legislation and the life of a new society. Public servants, right from the bottom to the top, should be the first to respect them. Just one example: the package received through the mail a short time ago from a former colleague. Well, I checked the contents against the Argentinian invoice note and some of the items on the list had disappeared." Yes, he recognized the words with a certain disgust. He tore up the sheet and threw it into the wastepaper basket. Here is another full page, the draft of another letter.

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"As you see, I don't practice anonymity. I take responsibility for my little demands and suggestions. They may be little, but they are important. What depends on us must be corrected, improved. At least what depends on us. I have already informed you of the wretched quality of the elevators bearing the sign ELEVATOR. Well, the day before yesterday . . . "

He was sick and tired of it, he had to admit. And yet he could not give up these beautifully handwritten messages by which he told the world of his existence, perseverance, and failure.

He looked into the distance, no place, before again bending bitterly over the words. "At the pound, dear comrades, they do something that not only animal lovers consider impermissible. By law a period of three days is allowed for owners to claim missing animals. The only way of knowing whether an animal is in captivity is to visit that institution. But entry is prohibited, and in vain do people stand at the gate waiting to pay the fee to recover their missing creatures. Comrades, this defiant trampling on the basic right to . . . "

Tolea had learned from his friend and neighbor Gafton that redundancies were likely in many enterprises. He shrugged his shoulders apathetically. Then he heard that as much as forty percent of office staff would be affected. He smiled and switched on the transistor lying on the desk of his colleague Gina: Monte Carlo, his favorite station.

Then someone started the rumor that such-and-such a comrade director had already been replaced by another comrade director; that certain networks were being dismantled and new links and combinations established. He looked on impassively at the hysterical reactions of his colleagues at the Hotel Tranzit: the bookkeeper, the barman, the switchboard operator, the cleaning woman were all glued to telephones trying to discover the ins and outs. He raised his eyebrows, in a superior kind of way, when his four-eyed colleague told him the criteria that would be used for layoffs. He merely lifted himself slightly on tiptoe, straightened his colleague's loose tie beneath his made-in-China shirt collar, and went to the window to contemplate the spring fever.

Gina tried to distract him by reading something from the morning papers.

"Listen to this story that happened yesterday. 'On the pretext that in privately owned apartment number . . . on the ground floor of the building there was a dog . . . or several dogs . . . and a cat . . . or several cats.' Well, what do you say?"

Stretched out on the armchair, with his feet perched American-style on another chair, his head on the ceiling, his eyes shut, Tolea did not

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appear to have heard. Was he meditating, or calculating, or reminiscing? He flicked away the alarming news, like some annoying seasonal insect.

"There now, do you hear? Pretexts. Where are dogs and cats going to have to live now? In the forest, in the wilderness? What do you say? Isn't it well written? Listen: only in forests, on mountaintops and ocean reefs. What are those reefs supposed to be? Yes, it's a strong article. I wonder how it was published."

It may have been at that moment of just-listen-to-this-ness that the strange idea flashed into Tolea's mind. The idea of playing a trick – something the public would not expect, something that would liven him up himself. For he was bored: Professor Voinov was bored to death.

In a world where everything seems programmed, even chaos, chance, or surprise, you've got to defy logic and bewilder people. You've got to make the fools believe that you control secret links to which they have no access.

Thought after thought kept passing through the skull of receptionist Anatol Dominic Vancea Voinov, known as Tolea; his brain circuits were working nonstop, in *perpetuum mobile,* and without a doubt it would have been possible to pick up signals from them. Especially as spring – oh yes, it was a real illness, spring, a real onslaught. At last something real and powerful, for which the numbed mice no longer showed any reflexes.

"The instigators – tenants from the block! I ask you!"

The receptionist seemed to have awoken.

Suddenly the world "instigators." Perhaps he had remembered his father . . .

And well, the heir will demonstrate that when all the games appear lost, a new one has to be invented, however bizarre it might seem, however futile it might be. So we are going to do things the other way round, *mon père,* completely the other way! We're not going to commit suicide, *mon père;* no, no, we won't follow your scenario. We'll just study it, act it, face up to it, that's all. Otherwise, without a mission impossible, we won't hold out against the spring or the boredom. Not even against the tedium of multilateral sycophancy.

Tolea jumped up from the armchair, alone at the center of the world, on the great stage with nobody else on it. *Personne, niemand, nikovo.*

"What's the date today, honey?"

Hard to say whether he was speaking to himself or to his colleague Gina.

Anyway, he knew what he had to do. He'd ask for a short holiday.

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They'd all be flabbergasted. To leave the place of struggle at the decisive moment, when the strings are being pulled and the broadsides delivered, when everyone is trying to save their precious little skins? He'd go to the mountains, solve some crossword puzzles – perhaps also the puzzle of Mr. Marcu, *le père de famille*. He'd go on holiday when no one expects to take one. Such imprudence would show that receptionist Anatol Dominic Vancea Voinov, known as Tolea, has special links; that he's not afraid of the pathetic office workers' neuroses; that he's master of the situation. Meanwhile, already from tomorrow, he'd start to recall all the most unfavorable details of his life story: the bourgeoisified brother in Argentina, the aristocratic Teutonic sister-in-law, even the cosmopolitan exploiter of a father, or the sister who had gone back to the Bible, yes, even her.

"I asked you a question, honeybunch. I asked you something my little chick. I asked you what's the date. What's the date today, sweetheart?"

So, March. Perfect! End of March, a sign of horny Aries. Perfect! Tolea turned the collar of his black shirt, the crease of his black trousers.

"If you can't get what you want, said Terence, want what you can get. Have you heard of Terence, Doña Gina?"

Colleague Gina smiled: she was used to Tolea's larking about. Unlike others, she did not think it was arrogant, not at all; she even rather liked it, really she did.

"And what about Baronius, have you heard of him? The erudite Cardinal Baronius? You must have. In fact, I'm sure you were rereading him just last week. Do you remember his monumental history of the Church, the *Annales Ecclesiastici,* from 1602? Do you remember how he opens his description of the tenth century? Of course you do. 'Behold, a new century is beginning, known as iron because of its baneful severity, as lead because of the prevalence of evil, and as dark because of the dearth of great authors.' "

Tolea stared at Miss Gina as he waited for her to reply, happy that he could have a friendly chat with such a well-educated listener. Her mean-street smile was a fine stimulus for his challenging lectures.

"And the extraordinary Gerbert, Pope Sylvester, what do you think of him, of his Roman imperial idea? Both remembrance and and a hope of consoling the great sorrrows of the world. *Genere graecus, imperio romanus*. Greek by birth, Roman by empire! – that was the dream they all had. He dreamed of world empire and absolute renunciation of worldly vanity. "A regime needs poetics no less than maxims of statecraft." Gerbert, our fantastic friend from Aurillac! Whose legendary knowledge

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assured him terrible renown as the prince of sorcerers in league with the devil. Do you remember, my little cauliflower? Do you remember the phrases he used in his letters? Cunningly embroidered yet full of love. Full of love, my little frog. *'Dulcissime frater, amantissime.'* Do you remember? *Dulcissime, amantissime . . .* "

And Tolea again adjusted the collar of his black shirt, the crease of his black corduroys, bent forward and . . . evaporated, just like that. Yes, all of a sudden he left his place of work and sighs. He did sometimes vanish suddenly, for one or two hours more or less, to tramp the streets, doze on some park bench, or get up to who knows what tricks.

He had disappeared, then. At some point he may have returned to the side of cherry blossom Gina, in the hall of the Hotel Tranzit. What is certain is that he spent the evening at Dr. Marga's, where he seems to have got drunk after some time; he could no longer remember whether he had slept there or eventually found his way home – which is to say, to the apartment of his friend Gafton, where he had his own little transit cell.

Anyway, he had slept badly, disturbed by dreams of huge metallic birds desperately tossing about in a completely empty space, colorless and noiseless and without end.

He had started in fear at daybreak, to stop the ringing of the alarm clock or telephone. But it had been nothing, after all – just a dream, a nightmare. He did not go back to sleep: the street hubbub was already pouring in, and the windows shook from the noise of buses and trams. He pulled his dressing gown from the back of the door and went up to the window. Right in front of the house, a huge prehistoric truck had broken down and was blocking the traffic. The hooting and braking of cars as they drove around the monster added further to the din. Mere trifles! Nothing could lessen the joy of having once more emerged into the realm of day. For Tolea nights were stupid and tormenting snares best unremembered; he would have liked not to think of them, however many enigmas they might contain. No, they did not exist, they immediately scattered to the winds. Oh, if the new day could be the only reality of his life! Spring, winter, autumn, or summer – it mattered not. If only the night could be a forgotten parenthesis, an aphasiac disorder!

The morning light had dutifully fallen on the sofa's white bedspread. On the sofa, Tolea stirred the instant coffee at the bottom of the cup. Slowly, slowly . . . Soon, then, once again at the place of atonement. "Hasn't the professor arrived yet?" woodpecker Gina would ask, this morning, too, if Tolea was late. Yes, let him be late: he did not feel at all like hurrying, so he slowly, very slowly, stirred the dark powder at

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the bottom of the cup. Gina would be arranging the accounts book, the pencils, the stools, the cushion on her chair, the telephone in front of her. Gina drank coffee at work, as everyone did, although it was impossible to buy coffee anywhere. No sooner had she arrived than Gina would disappear behind the office window and return with a freshly filled cup in one hand and her greenish orange dark-red blouse in the other, having forgotten that she was still wearing only a bra. She bent over the books, arranged the pencils, and only after some time pulled the blouse over her shoulders. It was the moment at which she blushed briefly, provocatively.

"Has the professor really not come yet?" the little mouse of an employee would, as usual, be asking as she did up the last button on her blouse. But no one would answer: the good-for-nothings had already donned their blasé masks. Gina, the comrades had decided, should be seen and not heard. Let the little gypsy girl remember her place!

In vain did she try to ingratiate herself by sharing their hostility to the buffoon. "Hasn't the professor come in yet?" But their sullen indifference did not allow for such complicity. "Hold your tongue over there. Leave him be – the loony's got his reasons." But if she forgot to point out that he was late, then it would be they who had a go. "Ah ha, our little wanderer is in for some big trouble! He can forget all his connections, all his bird talk, all his airs and graces. That won't do him any good. They're going to start checking up on him – his relatives abroad, his bourgeois family background, not to mention the windbag's own present life. As for his morals, we know enough about our colleague's little foibles. We know about acts punished by law. By the law, no less!" That was Titi, of course, starchy and oblique, with his delicate silver glasses and bony face, now thrilling to the subject. Corkscrew Titi, as he was called – but in the end less dangerous than the taciturn and seemingly tolerant Gica "Fatso" Teodorescu. Both passed with their noses in the air around pretty little Gina. Not because they disliked her or had some particular grudge. No, just out of the petty malice of people in a cage. "Watch out: call me when the ones in room 218 come down. Keep 33 reserved for me until three o'clock. No one goes into 105, not even for cleaning. When Olimpia comes with the coffee bags and the cartons of Kents, put everything to one side. You don't ask anything, and you don't pay a cent. I'm at the head office from ten to eleven. If anyone asks, I'm in a meeting. Unless it's Comrade Pastrama – in which case let me know at this number." The day at work: adapting to necessity; the torments, the humiliation, and above all the equivocation. A cheerful and ugly equivocation, so you can swallow the shit and forget who's watching your digestion – and your mask of contentment,

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so you forget about Titi and Gica and Gina.

Tolea had left the bathroom and was lying on the sofa with a book in his hand. He prepared his role, working out the bits of impertinence and the quotations that would irritate his colleagues at the Hotel Tranzit. Maybe someone had brought a bottle of whiskey for Comrade Teodorescu. Perfect: well, Gica old man, a comrade left that smoky bottle for you. Or maybe the optician Corkscrew has arranged a room for some boss man or other. Perfect: at twelve he'll be coming with a slim little lady in a red silk dress; fine, no one will disturb them; fine, we won't interfere – see nothing hear nothing say nothing. But we'll drive you nuts with Terence and Baronius and Otto III. The Saint: the idealistic politician. "In turn he offered to Romans the spectacle of his holy majesty and the aspiration to complete solitude in a hut of clay and reed." The Holy See, electric chair, apocalypse . . . twilight of the world . . . *mundus senescit*. And love, of course: the reign of love on earth, for a thousand years, *frater, dulcissime frater,* a thousand and one years, *amantissime*.

His neighbor Gafton had gone into the bathroom: he could hear Matei Gafton coughing and grunting. "Under the formidable pressure of the vast nomadic hordes . . . people had to go among the Romans to find safety and even food . . . We must admit the benevolence and even wisdom of the emperors who accepted those nomads . . . what historians call the infiltration of the barbarians." Recite that to the barbarians? *"Fruges, non viri,"* as brother Gerbert, the *dulcissimus,* said. "The fruits of the earth, yes, but not people." That's the kind of aphorism that should interest Corkscrew and Gina, yes, or rather there's room for speculation about such nonsense, really there is; brother Gerbert, *amantissimus,* had a head full of dross and long rigmaroles. He threw down the book and put on his black corduroys and black shirt: his uniform. That was how he appeared at the Hotel Tranzit: in work uniform. That is, in mourning clothes. He had several pairs of black trousers and ten or so black shirts: they could be made of cotton, linen, jersey, silk, so long as they were black. That was how Professor Anatol Dominic Vancea Voinov reported for work at the Hotel Tranzit reception.

He put on the black overalls as if they were a suit of armor. Yes, that was it. At least that was left, the defiance, and he did not complain that that was all it was – of course not. Night had scattered – that was the real victory. The calendar was made up only of days, coming one after the other. Night was a shapeless swamp, mere nothingness, a black hole. Thank God he had escaped again. You can never be sure you'll reach the frontiers of a new day. What a wonderful event was the day –

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oh yes, Don Dominic Vancea was ready. The story was beginning again: the cacaphony, the miracle of the day would be returned to him. Dressed in black, freshly shaven, head gleaming like the polar moon, hands in his pockets, lips pursed to whistle. "Disillusionment itself is a fire, and reality is a waking dream. The good luck to die before the death of one's passions" – yes, Maître d'Aurillac, that's right. A dry brow, upright and solid like that of a Roman senator. Roman the baldness, and the eyes as well. He's at the door, ready to leave. He takes the key from his pocket, along with a large red handerchief. In his black work clothes, and in his white clothes of idleness and life, a handkerchief is always included. Preferably red. White, black – sometimes a white one, a black one. But five percent red, as nature requires. Nature and aesthetics; five percent red. He slowly wipes his bald patch. Today, too, he's late: again they'll growl at him when he arrives. More proof that nothing has changed, that it's all the same, everything in its place.

Everything in place, *dulcissime,* we can leave. Here we go, *amantissime,* we're starting again.

**Translated from the Romanian by Patrick Camiller**

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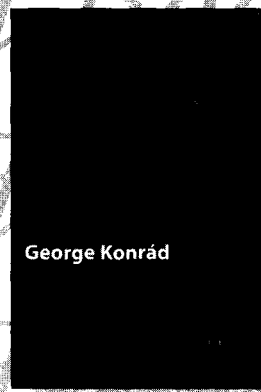


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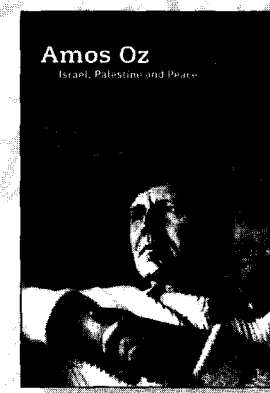


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# POEMS

## CZESLAW MILOSZ

### To My Daimonion

I.

Please, my daimonion, ease off just a bit,
I am still closing accounts and have much to tell.
Your rhythmical whispers intimidate me.
Today for instance, reading about a certain old woman
I saw again – let us call her Priscilla,
Though I am astonished that I can give her any name
And people will not care. So, that Priscilla,
Her gums in poor shape, an old hag,
Is the one to whom I return, in order to throw charms
And grant her eternal youth. I introduce a river,
Green hills, irises wet with rain
And, of course, a conversation. "You know," I say,
"I could never guess what was on your mind
And will never learn. I have a question
That won't be answered." And you, daimonion,
Just at this moment interfere, interrupt us, averse to
Surnames and family names, actualities,
Too prosaic and ridiculous, no doubt.

II.

My daimonion, it is certain I could not have lived
differently.
I would have perished if not for you. Your incantation
Would resound in my ear, fill me,
And I could only repeat it, instead of thinking
About my bad character, the decline of the world,
Or about a lost laundry ticket.
And it seems that while others loved,
Strove, hated, despaired,
I have only been busy with listening intently
To your unclear notes, to change them into words.
I had to accept my fate, called today karma,
For it was as it was, though I did not choose it –
And get up every day to honor the work,
Even if there is no guilt of mine in it and no merit.

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III.

Two five-year-old boys before the poster of a
nightclub,
On which a buoyant girl adjusts her garter,
Say something to each other or just stare
At the saurian whiteness of the thigh.

Daimonion, remembering my childhood fears
On this earth of the adults, I grasped who you are.

In their night of distant shooting, fires on the horizon,
Coarse laughter, grapplings, harsh breathing,
The heart of a child is troubled. And you, a wanderer,
Your pity is so strong that you avert your face.

You are a friend of the innocent and the defenseless
Who long for the Kingdom, as was that young rich
man
So pure that he blushed hearing a lewd word,
And really suffered from it, and probably for that reason
After his short life, they raised him on the altars.*

*St. Stanislaus Kostka*

**Translated from the Polish by the author and Robert Hass**

## Retired

An old man, tapping with his cane, aware of his silence.

Which fills every corner of his body with a dense, burning lava.

And confirms the trustworthiness of the words of Jesus about a worm that does not die and fire that never goes out.

Surrounded by his children and grandchildren, he sits down in a wicker armchair on the porch of his house.

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Voices of birds from the garden are for everyone, he muses, they do not care about me, neither do they know.

And I, instead of screaming and beating my head against the floor, admire the cloudless sky.

Soon that tale, never started, will pass away and I with it.

A cat sleeps in the sun, the world continues and does not need the signs of testimony.

For nothing would have resulted from them, except the realization that we are poor humans.

Guardians of prison trains, then prisoners ourselves, the torturers and the tortured.

Only I do not understand why I should constantly remember those things.

And accuse myself of events stronger than myself.

Longing for the thunderbolt of a stroke to liberate me from images of this earth.

An old man, serene, liked by his neighbors – he greets passersby, and envies them their innocence.

That is what they have, he muses, if they have not been submitted to a test.

**Translated from the Polish by the author and Robert Hass**

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## You Whose Name

You whose name is aggressor and devourer.
Putrid and sultry, in fermentation.
You mash into pulp sages and prophets,
Criminals and heroes, indifferently.
My *vocativus* is useless.
You do not hear me, though I address you,
Yet I want to speak, for I am against you.
So what if you gulp me, I am not yours.
You overcome me with exhaustion and fever.
You blur my thought, which protests,
You roll over me, dull unconscious power.
The one who will overcome you is swift, armed:
Mind, spirit, maker, renewer.
He jousts with you in depths and on high,
Equestrian, winged, lofty, silver-scaled.
I have served him in the investiture of forms.
It's not my concern what he will do with me.

A retinue advances in the sunlight by the lakes.
From white villages Easter bells resound.

**Translated from the Polish by the author and Robert Hass**

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**KAREN VOLKMAN**

## Tulips

*Immoderation* is the seasonal edict: tulips spike from the earth with the
force of the righteous, fist-sized,
uncompromising, unforgiving, barely natural ("the homespun surreal," I
wrote my friend, "like David Lynch") on prim lawns the leisurely
envisioned for springtime. Note: seasons have meaning where the
temperature changes (it is fresh life from sludge, it is renewal, it is
strategic) –
these tulips aren't scribbles studded in notebooks, not crazy color on a
ballerina spine,
they are burgeoned and blazoned, the pure indiscretion (for lack of
restraint is the seasonal *jazz*),
are turbines and toxins. Zany. Malign. Are the clown's painted Bozo
mouth on white foundation.
While at the backyard barbecue, I watched a man show a woman the
fragile tulip innards
(the two might have been lovers) like one flower inside of another, so
he
said, and talk swayed
to the intrusion of deer in the suburbs, those devout tulip-eaters, the
hunted at prey – as the sun creaked down over houses,
over apartments with their boxes of perfect *faux* tulips (for self-deception
is the seasonal fashion, I am told), over the highway
with its lone deer sprawled on the curbside ("the usual complications,
usual hungers, usual roles"),
and over the balcony of the handsome restaurant downtown,
where two ceramic tulips posed austerely, careful, cold (you would not
believe the science when he kissed me),
that must have been empty, that must have held nothing at all.

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## CHARLES SIMIC

# Night in the House of Cards

A lot of dust has settled today,
The Evening News said.
The walls still shook from time to time
As if the night was a truck
Loaded with gravel rumbling by.

Then it was quiet.
The builder of the house of cards,
Had rushed off
Holding her masked children by the hand.
I didn't dare light another match
And look at the walls.
There were pictures everywhere of bearded men
And their bearded wives.
The match-flame made them dance
So that afterwards
I lay sleepless in the dark.

In the night, the wind
That chills the stars to a squint
Blew a card from the roof
Up one of its dark sleeves.
The dawn sky was like a torn red lining
Of a fleeing black overcoat.

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## The Father of Lies

I have a garden with nothing
But barbed wire and cinder blocks.
My bees go around on crutches.

When they buzz,
It's a lazy afternoon
In the meadow,
When they go gathering
With their hats,
The sky is cloudless,
Birds sing.

The honey in the black glove
Is golden.
Give it to a child
To lick,
Give it to his dying mother
Lying in the shade
Of the old
Sleepwalking tree.

Time is slow. My bees
Are busy
And their eyes are closed.

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## YANNIS RITSOS

### Minimal Harvest

The morning glows with healing light, barrel-chested plane
trees.
The sea glitters carelessly into the distance, complete in
itself.
But the others – how will they survive on such a paltry
allotment?
They who once in a dream saw mass marches, banners, chanting
crowds,
who after so many years of preparation now feel themselves
wholly unprepared? They look across at the hillside, dark
with pines.
With great diligence and keen attention they amass fleeting
impressions – hoping to make their own claim on the present.
A young girl comes up the hill carrying a basket of
mulberries.
Leave it at that: the hill, the young girl, a basket of
mulberries.

*Karlovasi, July 11, 1987*

### Another Summer

These days of bright sunshine pull the plug on sorrow.
The houses scattered on the green hill gleam with whitewash.
And look – a roan horse grazing in the field. Out of summers
past rises
a forgotten memory. Yes, the girl in the cornfield was real,
and that boy in the gold-dust of afternoon, waving
a red beach towel at a passing boat. *You* were real, too,
with your faith in music and nothing to your name
but what you gave away, and what you still might give.

*Karlovasi, July 25, 1987*

**Translated from the Greek by Martin McKinsey**

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**DONALD REVELL**

## Upon Diagnosis

Being so fast, the things
of this world cling
always to excitement,
seldom or never
to one another.
Pathos is ravishment
by gravity. Myth is monsters
clinging to moments.

To the splendid encampment
Achilles summoned monsters.
Not one arrived, nor
plain nor particular.
Myth is the disappointment
of heroes. Nature
is likewise a disfigurement
of women and men.

I see a shadow meant
for someone else becoming
mine. I hear a blunt
inhuman sound becoming
sharply human. I want
attachment
to literally everything
elemental so everlasting.

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## DEBORA GREGER

### To Dido Later

I think of your thirsty ashes
washed at last in wine.
The torch is hungry and can't be blamed.
I remember my ship in flames.
The pitch and the wax caught first.
Then the flame climbed the mast like an old hand.
And then the thunder came,
and in the heavy rain the wood grew soft,
almost like flesh, until the ship swam
through the fire as if she lived.
Why couldn't you have turned
into a ship at the end?

I remember odd things.
A drinking bowl they gave me,
engraved with another city.
A pyre in flames in the brass.
A bare tree. Some goats on the rocks
and off to the side
A woman slashing her throat,
no wound for a woman to give herself.

The night has learned
to keep its loneliness to itself.
Only grief is left making a bed
for resentful care.
I would be the housewife
if I could, the one standing in the doorway
of the lower world.

The bees are hard at their tasks
like good Carthaginians,
building the walls you were so proud of.
The flower like a drop of blood
is blooming again by the roadside.

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## GREG WILLIAMSON

### A Dream Song

Him dreamed up Henry. Uh oh. The plot thickens.
Miss Apron ask them what they wants to drink,
and Henry's seeing doubles
in the smoky mirror. Parched as the dickens,
they raise them spirits and them spirits sink.
And you think you got troubles;

they running a ghosttown here. The shades is soiled,
With hatted Henry gotten up to sing
O frolicsomes O friends
O dears now bottoms up. How he be foiled.
A little yearning is a dangerous thing,
He dotes; all's well that ends.

Wine, women & song: shots in the dark, and he
will pay, poor Henryman, will have to pay
for damage to the smoke
and mirror. The book on Henry closed, I see.
What come of him? of Henry? Henry say.
– Mr. Bones, you broke.

## DEBORAH TALL

### Children's Beach Museum

Just beyond the beach
where sea turtles
lay their eggs by moonlight
this time of year

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a few maimed specimens
are kept for children
to look at – one baby
loggerhead, its left front leg

a jellied fin, another
flowering papillomas,
ocean water pumping
through a buried pipe.

They surface and stare,
bald heads fixed,
would snap a baby's fist off
happily.

Inside, under glass, stuffed
snappers and box turtles poise
and this owl, removed from a wire,
one leg burned off, feathers on end.

Grimly my daughter
surveys their fates,
glares speechless at the cheerful
volunteer guide, retracing the steps

she took just last month
with her patient grandfather,
his death still hidden in him
like her fist tight in a pocket.

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## DAN BROWN

### In the Chapel in My Head

Having gone
an especially rough round
on the phone with her,
I repaired to the chapel in my head.

Onto whose pew
I'd no sooner settled
than the Lord boiled up by the altar and boomed
"I gave you a tongue.
Abuse it
and I'll pluck it out."

"Hasten the day," I said.

## EDWARD KLEINSCHMIDT

### Transmigration of Souls

I have no trouble taking showers after seeing
*Psycho* again. The soap still lathers, I rinse off,
I'm towel dried. It's the other fear I have, from
A movie I can't remember the name of, one I
Came in on in the middle of, and then the storm
Knocked out the power. But fear is far from what's
Real. If I fear that there's no cure for time, then
The problem is solved. I can spend my time changing
Sheets at the Hotel Ashbery, or become a new pillow
In the linen closet, with a lace pillowcase older than
The heads that will rest upon it. Become the song in
The sing-along. Become a stick grapes can crawl
Upon. Become that brown thrush that came up to me yesterday

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And which may have been a god, too tired of being an ibis.
He was eating the bugs in the stone wall. He looked at me as if
I were mortal! He has flown away now, become a loop of
Film, changed back into bird, and if I can return to studying
Transitive verbs again, I'll know meaning doesn't mean
Meaning, it simply minds it, watches itself walk out the door,
Looks long after itself wavering, changing its soul with
Every step, each frame of mind frozen, then broken up,
Reforming every second into being.

## ANDREW McCORD

### Blue Hills

*for Rupak Roy*

Down a dirt track three
Miles above the power plant
The river whispers, in its iron
Vein, over the narrow, nearly

Silent valley while elephants make
Their vegetarian way through the forest.
The powerstation's postmaster says
An elephant is an ideal guest:

"He is worshipped, but he is wished away."
The herd stays across the valley
In the trees. A fat, endearingly
Flawed moon rises as the day

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Accomplishes its descriptive task.
Shaded from the moonlight even,
A young cardamom creeper sticks
To its post while an elephant

Reaches for an ebony leaf,
Snorts, scratches his moist temple
On the spine of an areca palm,
Then makes his bower for the night.

A panther pugmarks a new seed bed
Until the morning, and a wind comes
Down through a bamboo thicket
On the ridge, running a gamut

There of chest notes for elephants
And clear soprano octaves that carry
Over the dam, past the settlement,
Out of these blue hills.

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**RICHARD TILLINGHAST**

# A Visit

Mud spattered the windshield of my rental car.
When I asked where she was buried, a memory fell
Like shade across the face of the woman who lived
In what had been the gate lodge – then a smile,
A shy welcome, and she pointed the way to the churchyard.
Then a child called her, so there was not a soul

Between me and the sand-blasted spire of the Protestant church.
The shape of her headstone, beveled like the gable
Of a Dutch canal-house, was, like her handwriting,
Charactered but unobtrusive. The lichened marble
Put me in mind of the mottled green Parker with which
She used to write. The doll's-house of a school

Stood out from the choir of the church, where Joseph in his coat
Of many colors was first betrayed, where Mary
"Kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."
I peered into those depths, through cobwebbed glass
Where desks swam in the green of a river twilight.
Thumbtacked to the wall was a snapshot of her house,

Gone now, and the print of a Pre-Raphaelite
Madonna and child. My neglect – I had let her grow old! –
Burned in my face, acknowledged now for the first time.
She was Mary in the painting, I was the child –
I could see that now – nurtured and wondered at.
Ungrateful, and leaving already, I had struggled

To step off into an air beyond her containment.
Nothing stirred in that churchyard, or gave the slightest impression
Her story and mine impinged on the afternoon.
I turned away, walked back to my car –
Warned off by a treeful of rooks – and drove out the gate.
How long it takes us to become who we are!

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# In the American Experience:

## A Symposium

### in Honor of Alfred Kazin on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday

A Discussion of American Politics, Literature, and Cultural History

with:

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# BOOKS

## Leaning Toward Myth

**THE CROSSING. By Cormac McCarthy.** Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

At the beginning of Cormac McCarthy's new novel *The Crossing,* a sixteen-year-old boy, Billy Parham, is haunted by a wolf – and, even more, by an old man's solemn words that the wolf knows a higher truth than is available to men: "there is no order in the world save that which death has put there." A little later, as Billy leads the she-wolf into Mexico, her eyes burn "like gatelamps to another world. A world burning on the shore of an unknowable void. A world construed out of blood and blood's alcahest and blood in its core and in its integument because it was that nothing save blood had power to resonate against that void which threatened hourly to devour it." And only five pages later, the reflections in the wolf's eyes are "like some other self of wolf that did inhere in the earth or wait in every secret place even to such false waterholes as this that the wolf would be always corroborate to herself and never wholly abandoned in the world."

Great daring or untenable hubris? A writer driven by his unconscious, or one all too conscious of his literary affects? High consistency or mere repetition? Those are the questions that go round and around as one makes one's way through this powerfully heightened, defiantly unvarying work, that seems, from the outset, determined to present itself as a masterpiece. Taken out of context, much of this writing is so weighted down with portent that it all but keels over; taken in context – the context of an uncommonly lucid and lapidary prose that spins an almost hallucinatory spell – it can seem like the product of an imagination unvarnished, and all the purer for its distance from the real world.

McCarthy's is a cold, dry, barren landscape, so shorn of particulars and redundancies that it seems an almost abstract frontierland of the soul. It is a place of the elements, so bare that it doesn't have room for apostrophes or question marks or digressions, a world that comes to us with all the transparent immediacy of a vision (or a film). Thus places are defined in terms of north and south and east, and time is measured typically as "two hours past dark." Page after page proceeds without a single adjective or adverb; and the first date in the book appears on page 389. McCarthy's terrain is, in fact, a world leaning toward myth, and one in which every literal question acquires metaphorical meanings ("De donde viene?" people keep asking, "A donde va?").

This is, you might say, a kind of black magic realism: magic realism

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with an unhappy and unsettling core. For every action in this world is shadowed by some distant sense of justice that looms behind the characters like the outline of blue mountains; again and again, there are intimations of some higher order behind things, some ageless system, or forgotten wisdom, framed against a universe as cold and distant as the stars. Men are often animals here, or objects in a landscape more eloquent than they. (The fact that the main character speaks to his horse, and a wolf, as much as to the people around him tells you a little about how McCarthy regards animals, and a lot about how he regards men.) Indeed, if McCarthy resembles anyone, in his clean, lunar prose, and the unflinchingness of his vision, it is Paul Bowles, and the sere landscape around the Mexican border becomes his version of Bowles's Morocco, a theological black hole where young Americans come into contact with death and antiquity and the prospect of annihilation. His is a spooked land, of bones picked dry and bad dreams; a prehuman order, where things are reduced to a biblical simplicity: trees and huts and cool blue silences. But where Bowles has one foot in civilization, and shows the slow passage towards alienation, McCarthy is entirely out in the wild. And where Bowles has a sense of social and emotional nuance, McCarthy starts where society ends. Bowles, in fact, is so detached from his universe that he is content merely to record it; McCarthy, by contrast, cannot stop trying to peel the surface of the world back to find its metaphysical core.

And yet, in spite of this, curiously enough, McCarthy is never shy about his aspirations; he seems less innocent of literary tradition than almost any writer I know. When young Billy rides out over the border accompanied by a wolf and a horse, it does not take a graduate student to find images of civilization and the wild; and the border itself, which exists mostly in his mind, is as linear and schematic a symbol as any exegete could want. Mexico is antiquity, Mexico is death, Mexico is fate, we are told again and again. America is the place where all pasts can be healed, says one obliging oracle met on the road; Mexico is the place where the past is past.

It was this kind of promiscuous generalizing that gave D. H. Lawrence, in a very different vein, such a bad name. And there is an unsettling sense of hollowness behind McCarthy's cadences, especially as they grow more vatic, in the wake of *All the Pretty Horses* (the novel that propelled him, overnight, from dark cult author to runaway best-seller). Yet the case to be made for him is, in an odd way, the same one I would make for Lawrence: that he is absolutely committed to his vision and unafraid of making utterances that could be taken as

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unhinged. Unlike many writers, McCarthy does not try to do what he cannot do; he simply takes us into the heart of his belief, and – caught in his strange seclusion (he seems to live out of time as well as place) – makes fewer compromises than almost any writer I know.

At the same time, to this English-born reader, McCarthy seems a profoundly American writer, deeply physical in his attentions, and heavily metaphysical in his implications, impatient, in fact, with anything but absolutes. For all his extraordinary precision in writing about a wolf in a trap and a boy in a private medical operation (and the way one resembles the other), his is an impenitently theological book, about the secret design of the world and the passage of the soul. It is littered with young girls who do not speak and blind sages who see everything. And yet, if shaken out of its momentous cadences and claims, this book could be easily read as a standard cowboy tale tricked up in immemorial prose; a typical, almost romantic B-Western story of a boy on a horse in an alien world.

What distinguishes McCarthy, then, is that he can take the dustiest clichés in the land and make them fresh simply by the power of his writing. At times, I felt the same terror and raptness I felt when reading *Moby Dick,* the terror of being possessed by a man possessed, in thrall to some terrible vision. At other times, I saw only the strain of cadences that fall roughly on the ear ("Those too drunk to travel were shown every consideration and room made for them among the chattels in the carts"). I wearied of reading things like, "The world which he imagines to be the ciborium of all godlike things will come to naught but dust before him" (or, in the same paragraph, "Somos dolientes en la oscuridad"). I felt that a writer who reminded me so forcibly of Hemingway and Faulkner could not really be himself. And sometimes I didn't know whether to regard with awe or impatience a novelist who could write, of a teenage boy, "He looked fourteen going on some age that never was. He looked as if he'd been sitting there and God had made the trees and rocks around him. He looked like his own reincarnation and then his own again."

Towards the end, as the boy rides his horse he knows not where, on a quest for something in the desert, McCarthy begins to leave realism entirely behind. Everyone becomes a symbol or an oracle, and everyone speaks in the same odd, disembodied voice that suggests some post- (or pre-) human wisdom. A blind man in touch with "the true and ageless world," pronounces, "The world was sentient in its core and secret and black beyond men's imagining." A woman by the side of the road reads Billy's palm, and says "that while rain fell by the will of God evil chose

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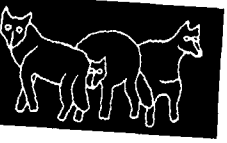

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its own hour and that those whom it sought out were perhaps not entirely lacking of some certain darkness in themselves." Even a traveling actress opines, "The road has its own reasons and no two travelers will have the same understanding of those reasons. If indeed they come to an understanding of them at all . . . The shape of the road is the road. There is not some other road that wears that shape but only one. And every voyage begun upon it will be completed."

In many books, this kind of prose would be held up for ridicule, or worse. If McCarthy's is not, it is only because his is so dazzling and eerie a narrative gift. His very pretension - in short, his high ambition – is what makes him rise above the world; he's wonderfully unabashed about laying his philosophy cold and bare before us, and shooting for the stars. And when one looks at the field of American letters these days, it isn't easy to find redemption. Pynchon can work wonders, when he looks in from his other world, and De Lillo impresses with his uncanny consistency. Updike and Roth keep turning out books with inexhaustible eloquence, and younger writers like Jane Smiley bring hoary myths into the American grain. But there aren't many novelists driven forward by a style and vision all their own, willing to lay claim to desperate heights. In that context, it is something of a miracle to come upon someone of McCarthy's audacity and range. For all of my reservations, I came away from *The Crossing* thinking that this really might be the first novel since *Vineland* (or, before that, *Beloved*) that did, in however self-conscious a way, belong somewhere in the canon. McCarthy is so anxious to stand up on his tiptoes that sometimes, I think, he really does touch the heavens.

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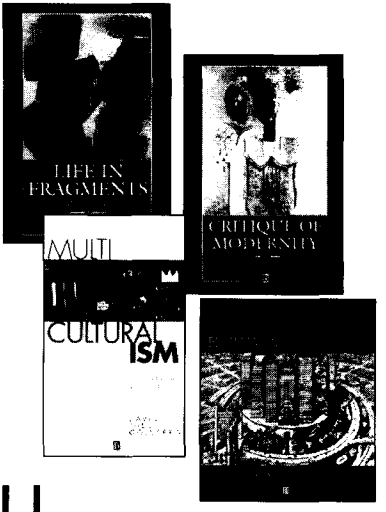


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by Peter Handke, presented in one volume as *Essays about Story Telling: On Tiredness, The Jukebox,* and *The Successful Day.*

In the original German editions, each piece appeared separately as a slim, handsome book, each entitled *Versuch* – a difficult term to capture in English without losing some of its resonances. Literally meaning "attempt," the term suggests an experiment that implies a certain humility in tackling the given subject matter, an uncertainty about the outcome, a grappling also with the task and how to approach it, all of it pointing to what the author is after, which is first and foremost tracking the right questions. Two of the highly personal pieces were written as Handke's dialogues with himself. Here, he continues a kind of archeological dig for a lost art which he had taken up in his play *The Art of Asking* , just prior to the *Versuche*. And finally, the publication of his long awaited one-thousand-page novel *Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht* (*My Year in No Man's Bay*) last fall corroborates the above quotation: The three *Versuche* constitute a journey towards the questions that would eventually lead to the novel.

It is not easy at first to find one's way into these texts. Like all of Handke's work, they are investigations into the possibilities and limitations of language, and in particular the German language with both its rich literary heritage and its legacy of political abuse. Handke's sentences unfold with deliberate slowness, as he unearths words, cleans off the dirt, polishes them, shapes them, and strings them in a syntax that reflects the movement of his world as he finds or remembers it. "Look and keep looking with the eyes of the right word," the writer tells himself in *The Successful Day*. Accordingly, the doggedly minute observations and descriptions of the places chosen to pursue constitute the real challenge for the writer, for they provide the "real" pictures, a secure foothold in the "real world" against the dangers of abstraction inherent in the chosen motifs for his "essays."

Each of the three pieces is written in countries where his native German language is not spoken. *Tiredness* and *Jukebox* were written in different parts of Spain, *The Successful Day* in Paris, where he now lives. Handke is also an obsessive translator, delving into Greek and Latin as readily as into French, English, and Slovenian, his mother's native language. Through such extended soujourns into other languages, foreign idioms and etymological cues highlight the world presenting itself to the writer in his own language. Cut off from its habitual context, it suddenly yields its own surprising treasures. With the painstaking gentleness of an artist restoring ancient, damaged pictures, Handke strips German grammar, idiomatic compositions and compound

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words, so beloved to the German language, of the rubble of rhetoric and the tarnish of cultural processes and political residues. The reader has to move as carefully, paying meticulous attention to the elaborate curves and sudden corners of Handke's syntax, ready to stop suddenly at the discovery of a single word or idiom that emerges with fresh visual power and beauty. In his above-mentioned, not yet translated novel, Handke speaks of French children "who, before seeing the first picture, have already learned the words for it, so that there is no way, not even for adults, that any kind of perception could ever emerge."

To add insult to injury, the *Essays'* full English title includes the additional, footnote-like explanation that these are *Essays About Storytelling*. If anything, it might be suggested that they are exercises in reading.

"Translated literally, the Greek verb for 'read,' used in the Pauline epistles, would signify a 'looking up'," the writer reminds himself and his reader in *Tiredness*. His texts require that kind of reading: the sentences don't pull the reader in and along; quite the contrary, they demand that one pause and look up from the page and out, open to see again with the freshness and excited surprise of the child at its first discovery of the possible worlds contained in words. Quite appropriately, each of the German editions are beautifully produced, in linen-wove covers lined vertically with the opening paragraphs from Handke's manuscripts, all handwritten in pencil: writing once again establishes itself as a handmade work. Both the cover and the finely textured, even weighty paper of the pages, rarely found in today's publishing world, introduce the book itself as matter that counts, where reading begins as a tactile pleasure. Again, the child comes to mind, tracing the lines with its finger (in German, there is even a word for the index finger as "reading finger"), holding it tightly at the place where the child has stopped to see what it read.

Suddenly, it seems only natural that the difficulties encountered during a child's first forays into literary works are also a part of the reading experiences of these texts. The long-forgotten childhood word *Lesebuch* takes on a fresh reality. Literally "reading books" (not to be confused with primers) these contain collections of poems, excerpts from epics and novels intended as elementary school children's first introduction to literature. Traces of those first explorations that evoke even the children's voice scanning the sentences, thereby indelibly imprinting their structures in the young readers, surface in Handke's landscapes – as far away as Anchorage, Alaska, Soria, Spain, Udine, and Paris, as familiar as Salzburg and New York – and miraculously reconnect me to the Austrian childhood we shared as members of the

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same conflicted postwar generation. "I have no desire to persuade, not even with images. I only want to remind each one of you of his very own narrative tiredness," the narrator tells his readers in *Tiredness*.

Tiredness is recalled as a paralyzing experience of exclusion and separation, such as the child's experience at Christmas mass, of being locked inside, cut off from the silent openness of the snow-covered winter landscape; later on that of the student, be it in a lecture hall or in the isolation of a rented room; or the lovers' tiredness of each other, suddenly realized in a movie theater. But tiredness can also induce a state of heightened alertness reinforcing the experience of community, such as the exhaustion of (Handke's) extended rural family after the thrashing of the harvested grain in the home barn with the participation of all generations. The depiction of this event is one of the most moving "pictures" of a rural Austrian community, stripped of all nostalgia and sentimentality. It may be Handke's single most important service to the German language and aesthetics, in the wake of its nativist vulgarization by the Nazis and, nowadays, the tourist industry. Inevitably, the remembrance of origin and belonging – to the Carinthian community of Austrian and Slovenian descent in Southern Austria – lead towards other haunting images of a people incapable of a shared tiredness:

> Then, in our shared midst of something resembling a "people," such as I later looked for time and time again in my native Austria, and time and time and time again failed to find. I am referring, not to the "tiredness of whole peoples," not to the tiredness that weights on eyelids of one late-born individual, but to the ideal tiredness that I would like to see descending on one particular small segment of the second postwar Austrian Republic, in the hope that all its groups, classes, association, corps, and cathedral chapters may at last sit there as honestly tired as we villagers were then, all equals in our shared tiredness, united and above all purified by it.

Gradually, Handke's calm, contemplative tone builds to a biblical wrath akin to another Austrian writer, the late Thomas Bernhard (which comes somewhat as a surprise, considering that the two writers were very distant from each other, both artistically and personally).

> A criminal who has escaped scot-free may often manage to doze off, whether in a sitting or standing position. His sleep, like that of many a fugitive, may be prolonged, deep and sterterous, but tiredness, not to mention the tiredness that knits people together, is unknown to him;

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> until the day he snores his last, nothing in all the world will succeed in making him tired, until perhaps his final punishment, for which he himself may secretly yearn. My entire country is alive with bouncy indefatigables of this breed, among them its so-called leaders; instead of joining the army of tiredness for so much as one moment, a swarming mob of habitual criminals and their accomplices, very different from those described above, of elderly, but untiring mass murderers of both sexes, who throughout the country have secreted a new generation of equally tireless young fellows, who even now are training the grandchildren of the senior murderers to be secret-police agents with the result that in this contemptible majority-country, everyone will remain alone with his tiredness until the end of our political history.

Tiredness, in all cases, involves overcoming a hardship; as an ideal state it creates an openness, "making room for an epic that will encompass all beings . . . ." Writing "about" tiredness turns out to be just the kind of hardship that leads toward that state: to the next, the real story? In the last exchange of tiredness between writer and his questioning self, the image of a jukebox, remembered in the Adalusian town of Linares, presents itself.

The only jukebox the writer actually sees while working on his piece about it is in an old English film shown in a theater in Soria, the small town in the Castilian highlands where he had settled in the dead of winter to pursue his work. The search around town for "the real thing" yielded one more, albeit concrete picture among the fragments of many others, retrieved from memory, of jukebox haunts and corresponding human habitats at home and abroad: in housing developments rather than city centers, in ferry stations as opposed to ocean resorts from England to Greece, to Alaska and Japan. These are laid out carefully, like archeological finds, in the wintery light of the sparse Castilian land- and cityscapes where he took his long habitual walks before and after writing.

The year happened to be 1989, and as Eastern Europe was opening up, the writer had been pushing West from his own Eastern roots in his beloved former Yugoslavia across his native continent, a strange sort of brave New Old World pioneer, a post-Berlin Wall Don Quixote chasing jukeboxes in the fragile dawn of a new Utopia, trailed by news of the Ceaucescus' executions. A remembered Christmas night in an Alaskan bar takes him across the Atlantic and the continent of every European child's dream of the "West" to the westernmost outpost, propelled by an imagination that had first been swept on the waves of

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# THE GREEN SEA OF HEAVEN

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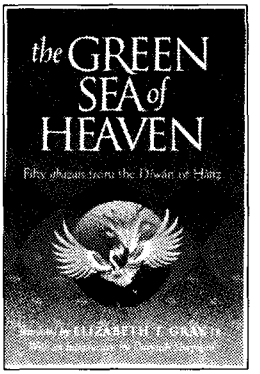


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the jukebox across the geography of its origins and glory.

His (*Attempt About*) *The Successful Day* constitutes another homecoming of sorts, to Paris, where Handke has lived on and off throughout his adult life. A few years ago the fifty-two year-old writer settled there once again, on its outskirts, just beyond the city limits, with his second wife, a French actress, and their small daughter.

The repetition of activities embedded in the familiar geography of home allows for an almost serene distillation of forms. What emerges is a larger, literally "moving" picture of the tangential "line of beauty and grace" between the outlands and the city, a wide curve along which the railroad passenger on his way downtown embraces the metropolis below. The line was first encountered in a self-portrait by William Hogarth, an "eighteenth-century moment." It reappears in a stone found at Lake Constance which the writer keeps on his desk. And it serves as the blueprint, as it were, for the balanced curve that would characterize the progression (as distinct from "progress") of a "successful" day.

Here it is necessary to once again contemplate significantly different nuances in language. There is no word in English for the "geglückten Tag" as opposed to the "erfolgreicher Tag," that is "successful," indicating an accomplishment as the result of a clearly targeted effort. "Geglückt" connotes exactly the opposite. Implying an element of chance, such a day would fall into place effortlessly, with no other significance beyond the full awareness of its presence and gentle motion, not affected by personal interferences. From the writer's pervasive, calmly comforting sense of being in the right place or, in his terms, of "fitting into the picture," arises the next challenge, that is, living this picture, balanced on the line of grace and beauty. All he can do is, once again, write it as a picture, if only in fragments. In his final exchange with his probing alter-ego, the writer tells himself:

> Go home to writing and reading. To the original texts, in which for example it is said: "Let the word resound, stand by it – whether the moment be favorable or not." Have you ever experienced a successful day? With which for one a successful moment, a successful life, perhaps even a successful eternity might coincide?"
>
> "Not yet. Obviously."
>
> "Obviously?"
>
> "If I had experienced anything even remotely resembling that, I imagine, I should have to fear not only a nightmare for the following night but cold sweats."
>
> "Then your successful day is not even an idea, but only a dream?"
>
> "Yes, except that instead of *having* it, I've *made* it in this essay."

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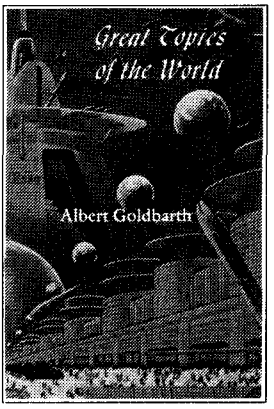


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And if the reader follows the writer's advice and goes back to the text, in the state of mind that permits him to linger in it, leisurely, looking up and around, yet staying connected, it may be the first indication of a successful day.

Peter Handke was fortunate that Ralph Mannheim, one of the great translators of this century, translated most of his prose texts over a period of more than a quarter century. However, Mannheim died after completing *Tiredness* and *The Successful Day*, and the final editing was done after his death. It is quite revealing to compare his approach to Krishna Winston's translation of *The Jukebox*. Goethe, the difficult almighty father figure, always, overshadowing Handke's (as any other German language writer's) aspirations, distinguished three kinds of translations: The first comparable to getting the reader acquainted with a foreign country, its prime purpose information rather than poetic vision. The second effort adapts and appropriates the foreign material. A quasi-naturalization process, aimed at eliminating cultural differences as much as possible, also seems closest to the American spirit. The third stage, further elaborated by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay on translation, creates a third work as it were, that stands on its own, with its own unique language and poetic sweep, thereby expanding both languages. Mannheim, having accompanied Handke throughout his writing career, has been able to develop in step with the writer towards the third stage. There is a distinct Handke tone, a characteristic vocabulary in his translations, which are no longer just faithful equivalents, but literary works in their own right. As a brilliant thinker on his own terms – Mannheim is the only translator of Heidegger who accomplished the task without footnotes – he could work with a completely self-assured ease shortening lengthy German sentences with complex philosophical propositions, simplifying idioms and rearranging secondary clauses without sacrificing their meaning or the overall rhythm – a lightness, so essential to Handke's aesthetics and ethics as a writer. He knows when to use *holy* and not *sacred,* when a *Bote* is not the messenger in the Greek tradition but a biblical herald, the (Kantian) *Ding Tag* appears philosophically not only correct but elegant as "the object named day." A couple of substantial errors which reverse the intended meaning could be due to Mannheim's often radical transformation of syntax and idioms, in the interest of both precision and lucidity; in some instances they seem to have been perhaps misread or misunderstood in the process of the posthumous editing. Krishna Winston's translation, by contrast, is faithful to a fault. Not a nuance in the winding sentence structure is missed. The result is oddly distanced and labored. Hers comes closest to an "essay" as

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a strenuous academic task, rather than the wonder-filled journey of a first reading adventure, comparable to a fiercely concentrating driver of a jeep across rough territory, as opposed to the open-eyed, gentle wanderer through undiscovered new land.

Handke is frequently remembered as the loud-mouthed, opinionated *enfant terrible* and cult hero of the sixties. About twenty years ago he withdrew from the fashionable literary scene in quest of origin, culture, and language, all taboos in the wake of World War II, he himself had helped to shatter. With every new publication he is accused by his former followers of withdrawing from the world. While his fellow German-language writers have been busy at present defining who among them are the fascists on the right and on the left, frantically adjusting their literary theories according to postwar realities, Handke continues to dig through the shards, across Europe and around the world, piecing together the words, in different languages, that do not prescribe but contain life as it is possible. So what does it all mean? Perhaps a pilgrimage of sorts, an attempt to earn the right of naming the world – in German – again.

**GITTA HONEGGER**

## Post-Communist Europe

**EXIT INTO HISTORY: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW EASTERN EUROPE. By Eva Hoffman.** Viking. $23.00.

There may no longer be many Jews left in Eastern Europe, but that doesn't stop them from popping up all over the place in Eva Hoffman's second book, whether it be in reality or, more frequently, in memory only. Late in the work, when Hoffman is traveling in Romania – just one of the five countries she writes about here – she and a companion meet with a young woman named Cornelia.

Never having been abroad, Cornelia is curious about everything Western and speaks with what the author calls a "hungry and generous eagerness." Hoffman finds striking Cornelia's cosmopolitan look, which, the author conjectures, must have been pieced together from watching TV and movies.

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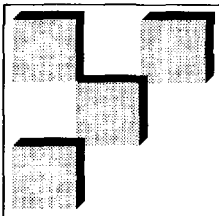

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At one point in the discussion, apparently having deduced from their names that her guests are Jewish, Cornelia turns to the subject of the Jews. She tells Hoffman and her friend that they are in a place where many Jews once lived. And though there are none left, she thinks about them often.

" 'Sometimes I go to look at their houses, their cemeteries,' Cornelia continues. 'Some of the most beautiful, big houses you see around here belonged to Jewish people. Sometimes I think I can feel their presence.' "

"I didn't expect," Hoffman writes, "in this tucked away corner of Transylvania, to hear about a once-thriving Jewish community that disappeared with the war. But the Jews, it seems, are the specter haunting Eastern Europe these days, the inescapable absence that is itself felt as a presence, a wrongness . . . ."

"The absence that is itself felt as a presence" captures exactly the effect the Jews still evoke in all of the countries Hoffman visited.

To write *Exit into History* she traveled to Eastern Europe first in the summer of 1990, and then again in the summer of 1991, to witness the creation of a new history emerging on the heels of the demise of Communism. As to the matter of the Jews, it made little difference whether Hoffman was in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria; the Jews were still there, in one form or another.

During her journeys, other discussions about Jews did not resolve themselves quite so benignly as did the exchange with Cornelia. In Bratislava, Hoffman spoke with a middle-aged man named Jozef, a Slovak writer and translator. "Everything in his demeanor proclaims a zestful love of pleasure, a good-humored enjoyment," Hoffman writes. The mood is merry until the conversation turns to the Slovak separatist movement and its struggles with the Czechs. Jozef supports the move. Hoffman presses him on the point, and it is then he invokes the name of Father Tiso.

"The Slovaks have always been treated as inferior by the Czechs," Jozef tells her. "Even Father Tiso has to be understood as the person who stood up for Slovak independence . . . ."

Hoffman is astonished when Jozef defends Father Tiso, since it was under Tiso's rule during World War II that fascism and anti-Semitic atrocities had so thrived. She explains, "I expect to hear such opinions professed by people who can be safely dismissed as extremists; but I'm baffled to hear them come from this nice, genial 'intelligent' who has nothing of a fanatic about him. This implies a different kind of nationalism from what I've sensed elsewhere: a burning, nineteenth-

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century kind of nationalism, which overcomes other scruples because it involves basic questions of selfhood."

Beyond the dimension of Jewish absence in Eastern Europe today, Hoffman finds a very real Jewish presence. Many of the older surviving Jews are part of the generation that strove to establish Communism in these countries after World War II; often they swore allegiance to Communism because they saw it as an antidote to anti-Semitism. But they were also the internationalists who conceived of ethnic self-identification as a form of retrogression; they were always more dedicated Communists than they were Jews. They purposely avoided their religion, considering it only a vague, distasteful memory. The contemporary generation of younger Jews are their children, equally ignorant of their religion and its traditions – a consequence of their parents' allegiances. They are members of the generation of postwar dissident intellectuals, most of whom had their political initiations in the late 1960s, and who finally came to stand in opposition to the Communist regimes.

This, of course, was not a struggle confined to Jews alone in Eastern Europe, but it is truly astonishing, considering the pervasiveness of assimilation and the devastation wrought by the Holocaust, how substantial their participation and presence have been. Many of them have even begun in recent years to delve into their Jewish pasts and struggle with the ghosts they've found there. The portraits Hoffman draws of various individuals she meets have a Turgenev-like quality of generational conflict straight out of *Fathers and Sons*.

"I asked Adam Michnik [like Hoffman, a Polish-born Jew] once what he thought had really gone wrong with Communism. 'I'll tell you one thing I learned from it,' he answered. 'I'll never try to make anyone happy by force'." But she also notes: "just as parents often pass on to their offspring not what they are but how they ideally imagine themselves, so the early Communists may have passed on a sort of social ego-ideal of a political morality and social engagement – an ideal that ironically carried the seeds of its own reaction, and their eventual defeat."

The story of the Jews is only one strand in Hoffman's rich, multi-layered book, but it is this particular strand which connects *Exit into History* to her first book *Lost in Translation,* which became an instant classic when it was published several years ago. At its heart, *Lost in Translation* tells of how in 1959, at age thirteen, Hoffman was taken by her parents from her beloved, magical Poland and forced into exile in a baffling place called Vancouver. As its subtitle announces, her story is about "a life in a new language," how a disoriented young girl coped

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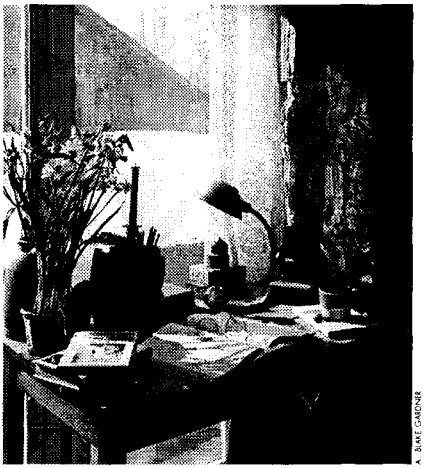


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with new surroundings and, even more significant, new words.

She reiterates in *Exit into History* the magical hold Poland still has upon her. Throughout her travels she identifies with the younger generation of dissidents in every place she visits, certain that if she hadn't emigrated with her parents, she would have been on the barricades with them. Hoffman writes of the grayness of Warsaw as only a native can; of the particular problems women face in Communist and post-Communist societies; of the strange return of the aristocracy in Poland; of a torturer in Hungary who in the new freedom bumps into one of his former victims at the theater and trades pleasantries with her; of the Gypsies, whom she describes as "the other Other in Europe"; and, in perhaps the most moving and troubling passages in the book, of a trip to a Romanian orphanage where the hellish legacy of the Ceausescu regime can be read in the decimated faces and bodies of young children. Wherever Hoffman went, she caught the essence of each country, without missing even the minutest of ironies in Eastern Europe's lurch towards freedom.

**ROBERT LEITER**

# Connections

**By Guy Davenport:**
**A TABLE OF GREEN FIELDS.** New Directions. $21.95.
**THE JULES VERNE STEAM BALLOON.**
**ECLOGUES.**
**DA VINCI'S BICYCLE.**
**TATLIN!** Johns Hopkins University Press. $12.95 each.

Few American writers connect as many things as Guy Davenport, and few surpass him in the integrity of his connections. He writes about historical figures with wildly pedantic accuracy, but his is not historical fiction. Ranging through art and history with astonishing erudition, his stories celebrate meadows, the pastoral, and camping trips. His fiction is a record of difficult and sensuous philosophical thought, and his characters make brilliant literary and artistic judgments, but the center of gravity in his stories is a child's knowledge of the body's possibilities.

*A Table of Green Fields* is Davenport's seventh collection of fiction. As in his other books, he offers two sorts of stories. The first recreates literary

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and historical characters – here Thoreau, Kafka, Kierkegaard, and the boy Jesus – and links them in subtle ways. The second offers reports from imaginary communities, usually Dutch or Scandinavian and inspired by a Scandinavian enlightenment of values. They envision a "maximum possibility of frictionless cooperation" among friends who have renounced the destructive forces of the century. The greatest statement of this theme is the story "Apples and Pears" (from the collection *Apples and Pears,* now out of print) which is both a meditation on the nineteenth century and a record of a small Fourieriste community consisting of a philosopher, an artist, children, and strays. The community is designed, in the words of the philosopher, to breed meanness out of human nature, to be a place where its members find harmony in their affections, where the body is returned to its beauty and the mind to tranquillity. The other utopian stories, loosely connected to "Apples and Pears," are similar explorations in which plot is reduced to the essentials of learning, loving, painting, and high-spirited sexual escapades.

Discordant and somber notes are more insistent in *A Table of Green Fields.* The four parts of the first story, "August Blue," form a complex and compact whole. In the first part, the boy Jesus talks with friends and animals on his way to school and then in the classroom produces figs, takes over the lesson, and instructs us in *alef,* the harmony between God and his people. In the second, James Joseph Sylvester (1814-1897), a Jewish mathematician, is hounded out of the University of Virginia by drunken, violent, and contemptuously ignorant students. After an oblique reference to Wittgenstein in the brief third section, its last scene recalls T. E. Lawrence's visit to the artist Henry Scott Tuke and the boys Tuke painted. (His work "August Blue" is one of his best-known.) The connections among the individual stories become clearer at the end, but even at the start we know that something is being said of true education – friends teaching or drawing each other, as with Jesus or Tuke. But such genuine learning is fragile, and vulnerable to the crassness of American education, where the child's intelligence is lost in doltish and inebriated self-absorption.

The Second World War, foretold by Lawrence at the end of "August Blue," meant not only the loss of idylls like Tuke's but also the murder of Janusz Korczak and his orphans by the Nazis. A doctor, writer, and philosopher, Korczak ran an orphanage in Poland along enlightened and humane principles. In "Gunnar and Nikolai" the sculptor Gunnar designs a work to recall Korczak and the children on their march to death. His young model and friend Nikolai learns about Korczak from him, and also about Michelangelo, Rimbaud, Martin

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Luther King, and others. Gunnar, his girlfriend Samantha, and the two boys Nikolai and Mikkel teach and learn from each other about the space of friendship, about angels, and about history and art. Though a visionary love which includes children is defenseless against savagery, Davenport reminds us it is our inability to imagine this love that would mark its final destruction.

All Davenport's collections are trajectories and variations which span an arc of themes. *Da Vinci's Bicycle* explores the foraging spirit of artists in conflict with political authority; *The Jules Verne Steam Balloon* wonders how much of our world is penetrated by orders of beings we do not see. One way to read *A Table of Green Fields* is to follow the loss of the ability to communicate with animals. (Lévi-Strauss once defined myth as a story from the time men could still talk with the animals.) We trace the theme from the beginning, where Jesus talks with the donkey, through the central story of Thoreau and his lost animals, to the silence at the end of the last story, "O Gajdo Niglo," where the friendship between a boy and a young man miscarries. "The Concord Sonata" sounds Thoreau's famous paragraph in *Walden* about the loss of a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove. Davenport finds Mencius behind that paragraph and has the philosopher sing an archaic lament on the disorder of the times. "The world's order is in the stars," Mencius begins, offering a variation on Davenport's favorite quotation of harmony, Pythagoras's "Time is the mind of the stars." Brought to disorder, we lose the ability to be neighbors, to be friends with others and with other orders of being. A penultimate quotation from Wittgenstein, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him," completes this chord and illuminates Wittgenstein's allusive appearance in the first story. We move from congeniality to isolation, from speech to silence.

Davenport's stories are often difficult and sometimes even obscure. Yet much is immediate. I think that his few readers have become devoted readers on the strength of many sensuous and rich paragraphs, such as this passage from "C. Musonius Rufus" (in *Da Vinci's Bicycle*), which records the first step in an obscure Roman emperor's return to childish innocence after a life consumed by politics:

> All at first was the fremitus of things, the jigget of gnats, drum of the blood, fidget of leaves, shiver of light, boom of the wind. The tremor of my cry may have had something to do with choosing this threshold. There are other sills, empty places with intolerable glare, presences, noon quiet, lonely desperate desert wastes. I have died again in them. Those who go to the inhuman to place their hopes upon its

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> alien rhythms, its bitter familiarity with nothing, its constant retreat from all that we can love, are hostages to vastation.

In a second example, from "Apples and Pears," Davenport's philosopher and protagonist speaks to us in a voice of both metaphysical poignancy and earthly grace:

> Rilkean angels, complex essences in a wind of light, fibrous with articulate memories, accidental events enriched into significance, a cherished smile, a long afternoon, a concupiscent dream, disappointments salvaged by courage, are the quiring that Fourier saw as a destiny of attractions. They are harmonies of essences. They are kin to us. They are messengers in that the composite knows how to appropriate the random, knows what to do with lost time, with the found moment, with a memory of apples on an autumn afternoon, of pears eaten at a kitchen table, longing in our eyes.

*A Table of Green Fields* is perhaps not the best place to begin reading Davenport's fiction. I recommend *Da Vinci's Bicycle, Eclogues* and *Apples and Pears*. Some of the recent stories seem to have undergone a loss of vividness and invention, especially in the sexual encounters which occasionally border on the tedious and pedantically healthy. It would be bad tactics to demand depths in stories that offer distances instead of depths; nonetheless, it is disappointing to find that a child's world has sometimes been reduced to simply childlike gestures. Still, all Davenport's books are joyous inventions, in which we find that we have lost our way, laid aside what we most need to know. Davenport is interested in everything; there is no hierarchy of perception. This fundamentally American attitude motivates his fractal design. His world is generous, and his art is never less than the conversation, sometimes the monologue, of a warm, gregarious, large-minded man.

**KENNETH HAYNES**

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# Letters

June 3, 1994

Mr. Martin Kessler
President and Editor
Basic Books

Dear Mr. Kessler:

I'm writing to inform you that Michael Wreszin's statement in his book, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald,* that *Partisan Review* when it first began was funded by the Communist Party, is wrong and probably libelous.

Would you please see that the statement is corrected or withdrawn in any future editions of the book?
Sincerely,

William Phillips
Editor-in-Chief
*Partisan Review*

June 15, 1994

Dear Mr. Phillips:

I write in response to your letter of June 3, 1994 regarding Michael Wreszin's *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*. Professor Wreszin has amassed a substantial body of supporting evidence for his characterization of the relationship between the Communist Party and the original *Partisan Review*. Thus we believe the statements made in *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition* to be true. Professor Wreszin tells us he has no objection, however, to changing the offending sentence in any future editions to read: ". . . and supported by the Party." I trust you will agree that this is a reasonable solution to the problem.
Sincerely,

Steven Fraser
Vice President
Executive Editor
Basic Books

June 28, 1995

Dear Mr. Fraser:

I would like to see a copy of this so-called "body of supporting evidence." Actually, I wrote about the magazine's sources of funding in my memoir, *A Partisan View*.
Sincerely,

William Phillips

July 19, 1995

Dear Mr. Phillips:

In response to your letter of June 28, I am enclosing a synopsis of some of the evidence that Michael Wreszin has gathered in defense of the claim made in *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition* regarding sources of funding for *Partisan Review*.

I believe that this displays Professor Wreszin's scholarly diligence. I trust that you will find his gracious offer to

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change the sentence which you found offensive to read ". . . and supported by the Party" a fair way to resolve this difference.

**Synopsis:**

Lionel Abel, *The Intellectual Follies,* page 46: "When I met Rahv and Phillips they were regarded by the Party as experts on questions relating to ideology and literature and they had been entrusted by the Party (in fact by Alexander Trachtenberg who was Rahv's political mentor) with a magazine, *Partisan Review,* which at the time I met them was a Communist organ paid for by the Communists."

S. A. Longstaff, "*Partisan Review* and the Second World War," *Salmagundi* No. 43, Winter 1979, page 108: "In its earlier incarnation this most durable of literary magazines was actually sponsored by the Communist Party through the auspices of the New York John Reed Club. What the Party's cultural directorate had in mind in helping the original *Partisan Review* get started in the bleak Depression was an organ that would focus and discipline the scattered energies of the proletarian literary movement."

Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle,* page 96: "Yet a break with the Party endangered those tenuous channels of support that had kept the magazine going even after it became officially independent in 1935. . . . The editors had received Party-related support to keep the magazine afloat. . . . As they broke from the Communist Party they looked for Socialist Party support.

Alexander Bloom, *The Prodigal Son,* page 61: "The original funding for the magazine came from the sponsorship of a lecture on literature and dialectical materialism by the English Communist, John Strachey . . . which netted eight hundred dollars and kept them going for a year. . . ."

Page 67: ". . . after the change Trachtenberg threatened to kill the magazine . . . "

William Barrett, *The Truants,* page 3: " . . . the magazine had been started a few years earlier under the auspices of the Communist Party . . . after it left it 'languished in limbo'."

Carol Gelderman, *Mary McCarthy: A Life,* page 81: "Phillips and Rahv founded *The Partisan Review* in 1934 as a New York John Reed Club publication. In 1935 the Communists jettisoned the John Reed Clubs, thereby giving *The Partisan Review* its independence. From this point on its relationship with the Communist Party deteriorated."

Diana Trilling, *The Beginning of the Journey,* page 287: "In 1937 William Phillips and Philip Rahv, fresh from their break with the Communists, took over the previously controlled *Partisan Review.*"

Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals,* page 81: "Even before the American Writer's Congress was held, most of the John Reed Clubs had been dissolved, which effectively eliminated must of the material support for *The Partisan Review.*"

Carol Brightman, *Writing Dangerously,* page 128: "The magazine was an arm of the Communsit Party's John Reed Club."

James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans:* Professor Wreszin notes at least some

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technical support for your position. On page 119, Gilbert states: "The encouragement of the Communist Party stopped short of any direct financial contributions to the new magazine, but it aided efforts to secure necessary funds by endorsing the new publication."

However, on page 140, Gilbert goes on to say, "he talks of how the demolition of the Reed clubs proved fatal to many of the little magazines, for without the creative and financial contributions of the Reed club members most revolutionary periodicals folded. Subject to the same pressures *Partisan* gravitated toward the League of American Writers."
Sincerely,

Steven Fraser

August 18, 1994

Dear Mr. Fraser:

Thanks for sending me the information.

The quotations are not evidence, nor do they supply any evidence. They are statements based on rumors, and only a couple of the references mention financial support. They are just assertions, that are repeated by Wreszin. The rest of the quotations speak of support in a general way, presumably meaning political support.

Most people who have not had direct experience or who have not done extensive research do not understand what the relationship with the Communist Party was. Let me explain how things worked. The Party as such had no interest in *Partisan Review*. But the few higher-ups who were concerned with literature did not oppose it, mainly because a few Party members were associated with it. Philip Rahv was a Party member, and a few other Party members worked with us. And it must be emphasized that the Party in no way initiated or instigated the creation of the magazine. In fact, we were opposed to the official Party organ, *The New Masses,* which we regarded as sectarian, and they in turn were opposed to us.

On the financial side, very little money was required to run the magazine, as costs were low. And the deficit was covered by the income from lectures on literary subjects, which we ran on our own. The initial sum to start up the magazine came from the proceeds of a lecture by John Strachey, with which the Party had nothing to do. We arranged the lecture and collected the proceeds of $800.00.

I should add that Communists and fellow-travellers did not expect any money from the Party. As young idealists, we were happy to contribute to the general cause, despite political differences and criticisms of the Party.

I hope this conveys to you why Wreszin mentioning financial support has no basis. I suppose it is better to speak, as you suggest, of general support, but that is, strictly speaking, not accurate either. The actual relation was that *Partisan Review* existed within the orbit of the Communist Party, although it opposed many of

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the literary policies of *The New Masses* and of writers like Granville Hicks and Michael Gold.

I hope you will be able to adjust the reference properly.
Sincerely,

William Phillips

January 22, 1995

**To the Editor:**

Just a note in response to Mr. Phillips's friendly comments on my biography of Dwight Macdonald (*PR* 4, 1994).

I have no wish to take issue with Mr. Phillips's reading of my book. But he has apparently forgotten that I did interview him on May 9, 1985 in Boston. He was guarded, and less than forthcoming. I have a tape of that meeting. I asked if I could have a look in the *PR* files. He asked what for and I said for whatever information I might find relative to my study. He replied that he did not permit "fishing expeditions." Mr. Phillips seems unaware that the consultations of archival files are fishing expeditions. Mr. Phillips has a reputation for guarding the *PR* files from prying eyes of research scholars. It is astonishing how many books that deal with the journal never cite the *PR* papers in their acknowledgments.

As for the technicality concerning the source of funds to support the first *PR*, when it was an arm of the *CP*'s John Reed Club, what it amounts to is this. PR gave lectures and dances under the auspices of the Club and kept the money to fund the magazine, which I concede is not technically the same as getting a check from the Party. However, Lionel Abel, a longtime contributor to the journal, has written in his *Intellectual Follies* (p. 46): "they [Rahv and Phillips] had been entrusted by the Party . . . with a magazine, *Partisan Review,* which at the time I met them was a Communist organ paid for by the Communists." I will change my reference in the paperback edition to simply say "supported by the Party." As for where the funds came from after Dwight Macdonald's resignation, I based my account on a letter from Rahv to Macdonald. Phillips fails to note that in my footnote covering these matters I refer to his "slightly different account" in his own memoirs. However, I could easily be persuaded that both Rahv and Phillips were being duplicitous as they kept all of this secret at the time. Nothing is documented in Phillips's own account, simply asserted.

As to whether I overplayed or underplayed Dwight's "anti-Semitism," I leave that up to the readers. I have been charged with both and even praised by Irving Howe for handling it well. The same goes for whether I treated Dwight harshly or was too friendly. I have been accused of both. I can only say I came to love the man, and many think that came through in my book.

Mr. Phillips and I do have one thing in common; neither of us can write like Dwight Macdonald. In that respect we are hardly alone.

Michael Wreszin
New York, New York

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**William Phillips replies:**

I cannot understand why Mr. Wreszin persists in stating that there was a financial connection between the early *Partisan Review* and the Communist Party. He cites no evidence – because there is none. This is not an earth-shattering question, but I would think the record should be set straight. And it even might be useful to understand the relation of the Communist Party to *Partisan Review*.

Lionel Abel's assertion is not evidence, since he was in no position to know the relation of *Partisan Review* to the Communist Party. Yes, we used the facilities of the John Reed Writers Club of New York to hold lectures. But as I have stated, the John Reed Club itself was not funded by the Communist Party, although it was housed in the same building. And as I explained to Mr. Fraser, Mr. Wreszin's editor at Basic Books, the Communist Party itself had no position on *Partisan Review*. But the Party stalwarts at *The New Masses*, such as Michael Gold and Granville Hicks, were hostile to *Partisan Review* because it did not toe the Party's literary line. The simple fact is that Rahv and I staged a lecture by John Strachey at a theater, which had an enormous attendance, and the proceeds sustained the magazine for a year.

Mr. Wreszin's assertion that we do not permit scholars access to our archives is untrue. We always have given correspondence that they asked for to qualified scholars. But we have protected living writers by not allowing random looking through the archives. As I recall, Wreszin was given Dwight Macdonald's correspondence after he asked for it.

On the question of anti-Semitism, the fact that Mr. Wreszin has had mixed responses does not appear to be relevant. I am citing my own experience. I do not mean to suggest that Macdonald's anti-Semitism was blatant; it appears to have been an early trait that he could not always control, and which did not keep us from being friends.

I thought I had made it clear that Rahv had invented a donor, because the real donor wanted to remain anonymous. The allegation of duplicity by Mr. Wreszin is nasty and uncalled-for.

Finally, I am sorry I do not recall the interview with Mr. Wreszin. And he does not list me in his book with the people he interviewed.


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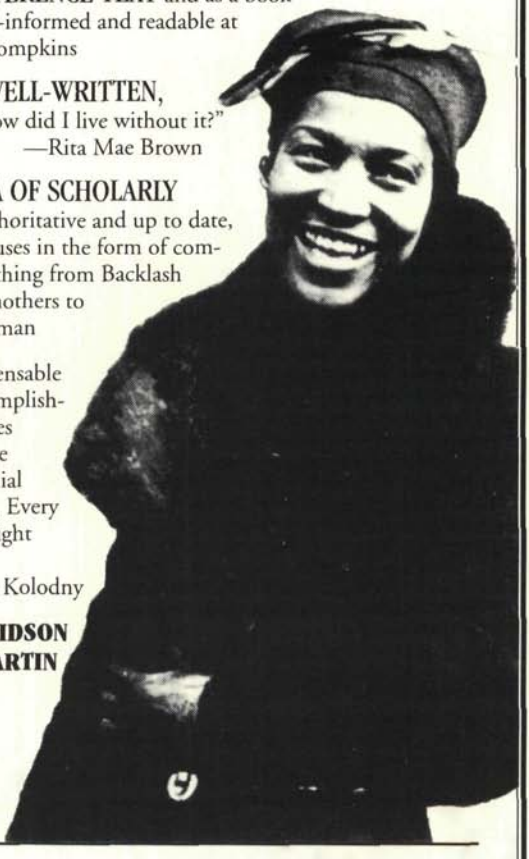

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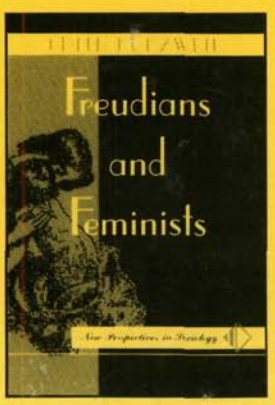
# Freudians and Feminists

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